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A MAN'S GAME



JOHN BRENT

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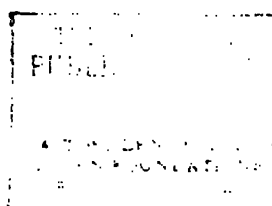


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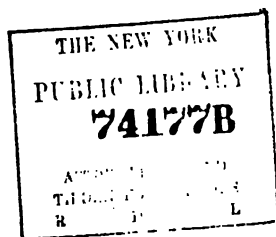
It was Don Eusebio

A MAN'S GAME

BY
JOHN BRENT



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A MAN'S GAME

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A MAN'S GAME

CHAPTER I

NEW YORK was sweltering in one of its periodical returns of torrid heat. It was August, and the old Delmonico restaurant in Beaver Street was crowded with business men of all types, taking a partial respite from their labors and adding to their discomfort by eating the far too stimulating food served by, perhaps, the best-known restaurateur of the whole world. Whatever breeze there was, and there was little, entered the large windows filling two sides of the long, triangular room. The noise was deafening; street sounds, the tinkle of glasses, the crash of falling dishes, loud talking, laughter, and the rapid moving of chairs filled the air. It was the epitome of American business life, undaunted as ever by no matter what physical conditions. Even when eating or ordering their luncheons, many men were carrying on business conversations. Clerks rushed in, found their employers' tables, and without ceremony handed them papers or whispered in their ears.

In a corner sat a group of middle-aged men, powers in the world of finance. Their table was laden with good things, and they seemed indifferent to the noise

about them; clad in the simplest and loosest garments, forgetful of their business interests, they were giving their whole attention to the pleasant matter in hand. Many were the glances cast at this table, for there was a little panic in Wall Street that day, and this particular group was supposed to hold the key of the situation.

Near them, alone at a table where he had finished his luncheon, sat a young man, smoking a cigar. About thirty years of age, large of frame, his clean-shaven, massive face was more like that of an athlete than of a man of affairs. Only his eyes betokened unusual intelligence; dark brown in color, they were never still for a moment, and by their quick, wandering glances gave the lie to the almost bovine placidity of his countenance. He appeared to be an out-of-door man who should be spending the month of August far from the cramped atmosphere of New York. For the moment his glance settled upon a young man of about his own age who had stopped to talk with the group of financial men near him.

The young man was speaking vehemently, and what he said appeared to amuse these men; but seemingly irritated by their amusement, he struck his left palm sharply with his right fist and spoke rapidly and aggressively. Suddenly he turned on his heel, and was about to hurry from the room when he was arrested by a signal from the young man who sat alone. The angry expression on his face changed and with a look of pleasure he came forward, shook hands, and sat down at the table.

J. G. V. B.

"Well, Jack," he said, taking the cigar offered him, "I'm glad to see you. Whether you can help me or not, it will do me good to have some one hear me swear. I'm tired of doing it alone."

Jack smiled and said:

"Go ahead, Bill. I have nothing to do till dinner-time."

"Well, let's get out of here, then, away from this infernal noise. Haven't you got an office?"

"Sure," said Jack.

As they were leaving, the financier whose jeers had annoyed Bill said to one of his companions:

"Who is that young fellow whom Bill Everett spoke to? There they go out of the door now." He pointed with a fat finger.

"That's John Wallace, a mysterious sort of boy who is said to be attached in some way to Walter Acklom."

"Well, if he gets the backing of that strong man, Everett will never come back to us. I think we were a bit too rough on him. He's a hustler and honest and has got hold of a good thing. There is big money in these Spanish-American contracts, if well handled; and if you know where he is stopping, we'd better telephone him to meet us to-morrow, give him a good jolly, and pull him out of his hole for twenty-five per cent. of his profits instead of fifty per cent. I like the young fellow and believe in treating him right."

"Oh," said one of the others, "don't worry. Acklom doesn't bother in any affairs but his own. Everett will come to us of his own accord; he has nowhere else to go." He added with a grim smile, "I have taken care

of that, and notified all the banks to give him the cold shoulder."

The two young men turned into Broad Street and stopped for a while to watch the agitated movements of the curb-brokers, who, defying the heat, appeared to be rushing aimlessly to and fro, shouting their wares, sometimes clutching one another by the arm and, to emphasize their words, even striking one another on the shoulders and breast. To the uninitiated it seemed like a riot, and a stranger to this method of traffic and barter would have looked for a policeman.

Everett could not avoid comment. Turning to Wallace, he said:

"Heavens! what an existence, John! What brutes these men must be in private life!"

John turned to his companion and said:

"You are a little unjust in your criticism, Bill. On the whole, these curb-brokers are good fellows, and quite like other people at home. They are a necessary offshoot of the stock exchange."

As he spoke, they sauntered on, and turning into Wall Street, Wallace led his companion into an old-fashioned building and, taking the lift, mounted to the sixth floor.

His office was hardly worthy of the name. A little room, dimly lighted by one window darkened by a towering building across a narrow street, it was furnished in the simplest way. To the right of the door stood a modern safe, the only thing of value in sight. In front of the window was placed a large, flat-topped desk, and on it rested two telephones, one red in color.

In front of the desk stood a chair, and on the left of the door, a typewriter on a small table. On one wall the Declaration of Independence, with its famous signatures, faced a copy of the Magna Charta. Wallace's university diploma and a certificate of membership in a Greek letter fraternity completed the decorations.

Laying aside their coats, the men seated themselves, Wallace behind the desk, with his back to the dim light, and Everett in the chair facing him. Seeing that Wallace had put his feet on the desk, Everett decided to do the same, and to that end tried to move his chair closer. Wallace laughed, for the chair would not move, much to Everett's surprise. Everett, slightly chagrined, looked up inquiringly.

Wallace explained.

"I sometimes have to check the eloquence of my visitors by breaking their train of thought, and I like to do so in as polite and impersonal a manner as possible. Almost invariably, to emphasize their ideas at their weakest point, my visitors will grab the arms of the chair and try to bring it nearer to me. The shock of finding it immovable dams the current of their eloquence, and enables me to dismiss them without too much effort."

Everett laughed and said:

"That's a clever dodge, and I'd like to see it work some day."

But Wallace appeared to be lost in thought and, with closed eyes, made no comment.

"You are the same old John," Everett said, after watching him for a moment. "If your eyes are not

open, watching things, they are closed, as if you were plotting out some scheme. You have not changed much since college. None of us ever thought you would make a fortune, but we all felt sure you would manage to get an easy and comfortable livelihood."

"It is curious," said Wallace, "how correct the judgment of boys is in regard to the character of their fellows. I shall never be rich, nor do I care to be, though I fancy my life will be free from undue effort and full of interest, and that is all I want."

"Well, I have made effort enough," said Everett.

"I have only the vaguest notion of what you have been doing the last ten years," said Wallace, "but it seems to me that I heard of you in South or Central America, mixed up in revolutions or similar profitless undertakings."

"Well," said Everett, "what you heard was part true, though I would express it differently. Putting it in a high-brow way, I might say that I have been engaged in educating ignorant human beings to be discontented with their form of government, with exciting occupation and profit to myself and my associates. I struck it lucky in the last two enterprises, and managed to pull off a good stake; one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, to be exact. Meaning to settle down then, I invested a part of this sum in a cattle ranch in Mescalita; but finding the life of a *haciendado* too monotonous, I sold out, and put what I had and could borrow into a contracting enterprise under the auspices of the Government of that country—building a railroad from Cruz Chico, the main sea-port, to Alda-

ban, the capital of Mescalita. A miserable narrow-gage affair is the only railroad in Mescalita.

"All seemed going well until last March. The contract was for a hundred thousand silver dollars a mile, including rolling-stock. To facilitate construction, they agreed to pay me at the rate of fifty thousand dollars a mile, payment to be made on the completion of every ten miles. The total length of the road is to be a hundred and forty miles. There are no real engineering difficulties, and only three bridges need to be built. On paper, as you can see, it looked like a magnificent proposition. Along with the railroad contract, came not only the building of the stations and terminals, but a huge contract for the development and sanitation of the port of Cruz Chico.

"The railroad proposition, as you can see, if you know anything about such things, was not a bad one, though the real profits lay in the contracts to follow. For the sanitation of Cruz Chico alone, a town of thirty thousand inhabitants, including water-works, sewer system, and paving, we were to be paid four millions; and for the wharfage and a dry-dock I counted upon getting double that sum. Of course all this is in silver, as the country is on that basis, though there are rumors that gold will soon be the medium of exchange."

Thus far Wallace had listened to Everett's story without comment and with closed eyes, but at this point he leaned forward and said:

"Just a moment. I'm no contractor, but this seems to be a melon worth cutting. How did you get this contract?"

"I'm coming to that now," said Everett. "At the beginning I told you that I had borrowed money to go into this enterprise. A former associate of mine in the revolutionary game named Wesley Harding, with a friend of his from Texas, Richard Ladbrook, opened the only American bank in Aldaban some three years ago. Through him I bought and sold my ranch.

"Although he has led a most adventurous life, Harding has had a sound business training. Ladbrook is more what is called a sporting man, and has been a follower of the races, a politician, and is said to have managed a profitable gambling-house in his home State, from which he has been driven by political quarrels and not for any particular fault of his own. He has charming manners and is what is called a good 'mixer.'

"Both are married, and are aided greatly by their young and charming wives, who speak Spanish fluently. It was as much as anything by giving the leading citizens a good time that Harding and Ladbrook were able to spur their lazy natures into business endeavor. Not only did they entertain lavishly in their homes, but after business hours they welcomed their friends and any prominent acquaintance to a back room in the bank, where poker and bridge were played, and palatable American drinks served by a skilful bartender.

"There is no club in Aldaban, and the back room of the bank has become the most popular meeting-place in the dull city. Owing to its popularity, the bank became the most prominent in Mescalita and bade fair to monopolize the business of the whole country and to become the fiscal agent of the Government.

"They have only one real rival, the bank of Schwartz & Co., a German affair, recently established in the country and which has done but little business. However, it is rumored that Schwartz is backed by the German Imperial Government and that it is the intention of that Government to use him to acquire control of the business of the whole country. Schwartz is a young man of pleasant appearance, but his manners of a Prussian officer are against him, and lack entirely the suavity and bonhomie necessary to a man of affairs in a Spanish-American country.

"Of course there is an American minister and a consul, but for all useful purposes our country is virtually unrepresented, as these two gentlemen are more bent upon saving their salaries and maintaining friendly relations with rye whisky than aiding American enterprise. They are both Civil War veterans and thought more of the G. A. R. than of the U. S. A. Needless to say, Harding, Ladbroke, and I saw as little of them as possible.

"You know, John, that the government of all these so-called Spanish-American countries is more or less similar, ostensibly a republic, but really a dictatorship, and political parties do not represent ideas, but are formed by the followers of some able and aggressive personality.

"The President of Mescalita, Sylvio Obregon, is a thoroughbred Indian who has been in power for more than twenty years, the early part of his life having been spent in continuous warfare and rebellion, during which time all his active rivals and enemies have either

been killed in battle or died in exile. He is now seventy years of age, childless, and in failing health, and political groups are being formed with the object of naming his successor. The three most prominent groups are led by Don Emilio Estrada, the secretary of the treasury and public works combined, and the secretaries of war and foreign affairs, respectively, General Juan Carlos and Don Saturnino Henriquez.

"Old Obregon maintains his position without difficulty by playing these men against one another, for they are so jealous that each plays a lone hand and endeavors to concentrate all the power in himself. Obregon loves money, and there is no doubt that his favorite is Don Emilio Estrada, who supplies him with it, and who has been in power nearly as long as his chief. Both have amassed fortunes, which are said to be largely invested in Paris and London. The secretaries of war and foreign affairs have not been in power so long, and as their offices force them to make a display and live extravagantly, neither is in more than relatively easy circumstances, though they cannot be called poor.

"President Obregon lives a retired life, showing himself to the populace only on gala occasions, and never by any chance entertaining any one at the palace, where he lives in the simplest manner with his wife, who is of pure Spanish descent, much younger than himself and of whom he is both inordinately proud and extremely jealous. Donna Elvira does not mix in any way in public affairs, but has worked tirelessly to advance the interests of her family, and it is said that she

is secretly plotting to make her younger brother the successor of her husband.

"Till lately Don Eusebio Calderon, her brother, has been rarely seen in Aldaban, but has lived quietly on his immense estate, some distance from the capital. He is a typical Spanish-American in appearance. Short and sturdy in frame, his out-of-door life has lent color to his sallow complexion. He wears the native costume, heavily ornamented with both gold and silver. He makes a fine figure on horseback, and in his daily rides through Aldaban fires many a lady's heart. He boasts of his hatred for Americans and never associates with them, but is suspected of a deep admiration for Mrs. Ladbrook and hardly a day goes by that he does not canter past her windows.

"On the other hand, Obregon's ministers mix freely in the life of the people, and there is socially as great a rivalry between Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez as there is politically. All three are frequent visitors at the houses of Harding and Ladbrook, and not a day passes but one or all of them drop in at the back room of the bank after business hours, where they not only chat and drink, but are also ardent poker-players. In the beginning each won large sums of money, but for the last two years they have lost, Estrada particularly. Indeed, he has found it difficult to meet his obligations, and the bankers have gained his good graces by not pressing him for payment. A year ago he owed them a hundred thousand dollars, and thereby hangs the tale of how I got the contract.

"I told you that I sold my ranch. Well, to do this,

about nine months ago, I went to Aldaban and put the matter in Harding's hands. One afternoon in the back room I met for the first time the three ministers. A poker game started almost immediately, and, strangely enough, I had good luck, and at the end had a thousand dollars. Estrada was the principal loser, and, it seemed to me, took his loss rather ill; but Ladbroke joked him and soon got him in a good humor. We dined that night at Harding's house. The other guests were Estrada and the Ladbroke. Estrada sat between his hostess and Mrs. Ladbroke, and seemed enchanted by the latter lady.

"Mrs. Harding and Mrs. Ladbroke, though of about the same age and figure, are as different as possible in appearance. Violet Harding is of a beautiful blond type, and has all the elusiveness that goes with her coloring, though her dark-blue eyes are full of Southern fire. Margaret Ladbroke, on the contrary, is almost Spanish in appearance; her heavy, dark hair, strongly marked eyebrows, and black eyes make her look perfectly at home in tropical surroundings. These women differ also in another respect. Mrs. Harding's manner is quiet, and she seems at peace with all the world; but Mrs. Ladbroke is very nervous.

"After dinner the ladies went up-stairs, and no sooner had they gone than Ladbroke, referring to something said at dinner, began:

" 'It is to you, Estrada, that this country must look for any movement in the direction of progress. The president seems to have settled down into a state of absolute indifference; you must either wake him up or

arrange some way to go on without him. What you want here is foreign capital, and the only way to get that is, as I have always told you, to show some enterprise and start public works. The finances of Mescalita are in a wretched state, and your sole salvation is in activity. The taxes, both municipal and national, are only about one-tenth of what this rich country can stand, though it is only half developed. For God's sake, my dear friend, wake up! You know that you can talk frankly to both Harding and me, and our young friend Everett is really one of us. You have been talking for years of building a good railroad to Cruz Chico and developing that port. Let's begin to-night and spend an hour putting some life into the scheme.'

"Estrada smiled deprecatingly, and, making a gesture with his right hand, on a finger of which flashed an enormous diamond, said:

" 'I fear you do me too much honor. There are other people whose influences in this country are perhaps as powerful as my own. However, I feel flattered that you have come to me.' Then, with a shrewd glance, which took in rapidly both Harding and Ladbroke, he added, 'If you have not approached anybody else but me——'

"The two partners shook their heads, and Ladbroke said emphatically:

" 'We have not even thought of going to any one else. We are friendly to all the members of the Government at Mescalita from the president down, but we feel that we know you the best and we certainly like you the best. A little proof of our affection for you is this.'

Drawing from his inner pocket a sealed letter, Ladbroke handed it to Estrada and said: 'Read it when you go home.' In this envelope was a receipt in full for the money he had lost in play.

"After a pause Ladbroke said:

" 'Let's take up this railroad business. All you have got to do is to pass a law in Congress, authorizing its construction and defining the method and means of payment. Then get the *ayuntamientos* of Aldaban and Cruz Chico to pass bills associating the respective cities in the work, and the thing is done. Harding, myself, and our young friend here will furnish the means for starting the enterprise, and Everett will take charge of the work. You know us all and know that we will do good work, but we shall expect good pay. Now, of course, we don't expect your aid for nothing, and, moreover, we wish to do you a good turn. If you pay us a hundred thousand dollars a mile, we will turn over to you ten thousand of this, to be distributed, as you see fit, where it will do the most good. We count upon you to handle this money in an intelligent way, so that quarrels will not spring up through jealousy and that the matter will go along smoothly when once it is started.'

"Estrada had not moved or changed his expression since receiving the letter handed to him by Ladbroke; but as Ladbroke finished, he rose to his feet, and with a dramatic gesture said:

" 'Gentlemen, you may count upon me, but I depend upon you to draw up the detailed plans of the concession.'

"Harding had the plans ready, which were what I have outlined to you a little while ago; but with these other and most important details added. The treasury of Mescalita was virtually empty, and neither Aldaban nor Cruz Chico had any surplus funds at their disposal. So, to meet the cost of the work in hand, it was proposed, first, to impose new taxation upon the two cities and to increase the taxes of the Central Government; and against these new taxes to make a loan of twenty-five millions in silver, this loan, bearing interest at five per cent., to be issued in New York or in Europe at eighty cents on the dollar. It was thought that, with the guaranty of the Central Government and the two principal cities behind it, the loan would find a ready market even though the country was on a silver basis. As it would take time to market this loan, it was proposed to make the payments as the work progressed by issuing interim certificates at par, bearing interest at six per cent., the certificates to be exchanged for the bonds when they were printed.

"All this was done and enabling acts were passed by Congress and the *ayuntamientos* of Aldaban and Cruz Chico. A survey, which had been made five years before, was accepted by the contractors, and on the first of last January the work was opened at Cruz Chico with a flourish of trumpets, a mass-meeting, a religious ceremony, and a great banquet at which the entire Government and many prominent people were present. The only noticeable absentee was Don Eusebio Calderon, who had excused himself on the plea of illness. Later on, it

became only too evident that his illness was of a diplomatic nature.

"Meanwhile the interim certificates were ready against the first demands for payment on the part of the concessionnaires. On their face, they called for payment in bonds, to be printed and issued ninety days after date; and it was decided that the contractors should not sell the certificates, but would keep them until the bonds representing the loan were in their hands. Estrada had assured the bankers that the order for the bonds had been given, and that they would be in their hands on the date called for by the certificates.

"We rushed the work, and at the end of ninety days we had in our possession more than four hundred thousand dollars in certificates. When Harding appeared at the treasury to demand the bonds, however, he was much chagrined to learn from Estrada that they had not yet arrived from New York, but he expected them in a day or two. Harding, though disappointed, was not greatly surprised, knowing well the carelessness of the Spanish-American; but he insisted on knowing the exact date when he would receive them. Though Estrada was profuse in his assurances that they would soon arrive, he would not or could not name a date, and seemed irritated at Harding's firmness in demanding one.

"At length it was learned that Estrada had not divided the ten per cent. of the cost of the contract in a fair manner, and President Obregon, dissatisfied with his share, in order to punish Estrada, at the suggestion of his wife, he had placed the matter of getting

the bonds printed in the hands of her brother, Don Eusebio Calderon. Harding at once suspected that the order for printing the bonds had not even been given and that the whole enterprise was in peril.

"He hurried back to his office. I happened to be in Aldaban, and soon the three of us, Harding, Ladbrook, and I, were closeted together in the famous back room. In a few words Harding explained the state of affairs to Ladbrook and me, ending by saying sarcastically to Ladbrook:

" 'Well, Dick, it seems to me that all this mess is due largely to you.'

"Ladbrook, who was pacing the room nervously, scowled and said:

" 'Steady, Wesley; don't start shifting the blame. I don't see how you can make me the goat in this affair.'

" 'Why not?' said Harding, sharply. 'It was you who had the brilliant idea of giving Estrada the receipt in full for his poker losses. From that moment he looked on us as easy marks. I told you at the time, you will remember, that it was stupid to count upon the gratitude of any of these hounds; and I was right.'

" 'But,' said Ladbrook, 'I don't think Estrada is entirely to blame. Calderon and his sister, Donna Elvira, are the ones who have put up this game on us.'

" 'Shucks!' said Harding. 'Let's be honest and see the game as the cards lie. We are up against the whole mob——'

" 'And more, too,' said I, interrupting.

" 'What do you mean by that?' asked Harding.

“ ‘This,’ said I. ‘The man behind the whole play is Schwartz and his damned German bank. He was keen enough to urge the passing of the loan upon Obregon, because he hoped to handle it; but when he saw that the business was for us, he began to work night and day to smash the enterprise. *He* is the nigger in the wood-pile. He realizes that the contract is a good one, for it is certain that he has had a look at the figures, and knows to a drop the quantity and quality of milk in the cocoanut. If we fail, and it seems likely that we shall,—remember that clause in the contract which calls for the completion of the work within three years of our undertaking it,—Schwartz, backed by his Government, will take over the whole affair, and gain not only money, but sufficient prestige to make the firm of Harding & Ladbrook a back number in Mescalita, and weaken the influence of the United States and give Mescalita into the hands of Germany. I believe Schwartz has not only got Estrada on his side, but is working hand in glove with Donna Elvira to further the ambitions of Don Eusebio. We all know what they are—to succeed his brother-in-law Obregon as president.’

“Ladbrook seemed to listen more intently than Harding to my story, and, giving us both a shrewd glance, said:

“ ‘I don’t think that Estrada has double-crossed us willingly. He sees a lot of my wife, and in talking matters over with her swears that he is with us heart and soul. I believe that we should come to terms with him and promise him our backing, even to the extent of aiding him in his ambitions for the presidency. We

shall have to play real politics and, getting Carlos and Henriquez to join Estrada, use that triumvirate to overcome the combined efforts of Obregon, his wife, and Don Eusebio.'

" 'Stop a moment,' said Harding. 'This game needs money; for it may mean revolution and civil war, and Bill Everett and I know what that costs.'

" 'I thought of that,' said Ladbrook. 'Although Carlos and Henriquez are *pobrecitos*,¹ Estrada is a rich man, and, I believe, can be induced to bet on his hand in this game and contribute a large sum, even a million dollars. With this sum and what we three can put up, we'll have enough to start. Also, I'll bet we can find a capitalist in New York to go into the game on the promise of concessions. By taking a small loss, we can even get him to cash our interim certificates, which amount to, say, two hundred thousand dollars in gold. The surface of this country has not been scratched yet. There are gold-, silver- and copper-mines to be developed, vast forests to be exploited, not to speak of a great increase possible in the coffee, sugar, and banana trade.'

"Harding looked at his watch and said:

" 'It is about time for the crowd to turn up. If the three ministers come as usual, I shall take it as a good omen, and for one will say yes to Ladbrook's proposition.' He turned to me. 'What do you say, Bill?'

"On hearing Ladbrook's plan, I had become sicker and sicker at heart; for, as I told you, John, I had intended to settle down and quit the revolutionary business for good. Now it seemed that fate was too strong

¹"Poor people."

for me, and that I would be again forced to stake my all on the chances of plot, counterplot, and war. So I shrugged my shoulders and said: 'I am with you, boys.'

"I had hardly finished speaking when a knock was heard at the door, and, without waiting for an answer, it opened, and Schwartz appeared on the threshold.

" 'Hello, Schwartz!' said Ladbrook, with that charming smile of his, which ever concealed his innermost feelings, whether at the card-table or in business. Schwartz gave a quick glance about the room, and seemed to be surprised that we three Americans were the only ones present. For a moment he hesitated, as if about to take his departure. But presently he came in, greeting us all with that mixture of servility and haughtiness which stamps the German manner.

" 'Ben, make us four Ladbrooks,' said Harding.

"The white-jacketed bartender set to work, and in a twinkling placed four glasses upon the table. The liquid they contained resembled absinthe in color, though it was of a far more innocent nature. Ladbrook had invented it and had given it his name. The drink consisted of rum, sugar, the juice of several limes, and plenty of cracked ice, and so was really the wine of the country. We three had only one idea, and that was to get rid of Schwartz as soon as possible, and to that end Ladbrook was most pleasant to him.

" 'Well, Schwartz,' he said, 'so you are to become a real sport at last and are going to cut in in our big Saturday poker-game, which, as you know, has a hundred-dollar limit. We were afraid that you were only

a piker, and would never get beyond a two-dollar game.' As he spoke, Ladbroke opened the box of chips, and placed two new packs of cards on the table.

"Schwartz smiled ingratiatingly.

" 'Won't you break your rule for once, gentlemen, and let me look on at your big game? Perhaps, then, I shall get courage to play. I know your rule is to have no onlookers on Saturday; but won't you, please, make an exception for once for your good German friend?'

" 'Sorry, Schwartz,' said Harding, emphatically; 'but that's a rule we cannot break, and you know why: we do not want the players to feel that the news of their losses or winnings might be peddled about. With all your charming qualities, Schwartz, you are the best little news-spreader in town. The "Gazetta Nacional" is a two-spot compared with you.'

"Schwartz flushed at this, and seemed almost about to say that he would join the game, when his Teutonic caution and a certain niggardliness in his character asserted themselves, and he said:

" 'I shall stick to the two-dollar game, and will come to play on Monday.'

" 'Well, then, beat it,' said Harding, 'for here come the real players.' As he spoke, Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez entered. Harding turned to Ben, saying: 'Tell them to close up the bank, and you can go, Ben. We'll mix our own drinks. Take a seat under the awning in front of the bank and shoo off any visitors. We'll shout if we want you.'

"Schwartz left, Ben did as he was told, and the three

ministers took their seats at the table. All these manœuvres were usual on Saturday, and passed unnoticed; but when Harding turned the key in the door, his guests looked somewhat surprised. He took his seat, leaned forward, and, placing his hands almost affectionately on Estrada's shoulders and looking at him straight in the eyes, said:

“ ‘My friend, I am taking extra precautions to-day against disturbers, for the stakes are to be much higher than a hundred dollars, and I hope that you, Don Emilio, for once will be the great winner.’ ”

CHAPTER II

HARDING paused a moment and then continued:

“ ‘Power is a good game, but no matter how high the stakes, it is a child’s affair compared with the game of politics, played properly. In politics there is no limit, for power and wealth and the enjoyment of life that these bring are the stakes. Now, gentlemen, I will try to lay before you the game as we three Americans see it, and as I believe you do as well. Then, having agreed upon the rules of the game, we will place *all* the cards in your hands and ask you to deal the first hand.’ ”

“After a pause, he continued:

“ ‘Gentlemen, the time has arrived to decide whether Mescalita is to become one of the noblest and most prosperous states on the American continent, governed loyally in the interests of its people and in sympathy with that great friendly power, the United States of America; or, betrayed by its leaders, is to abandon not only its independence, but the Monroe Doctrine, which safeguards that independence, and be delivered body and soul into the corrupting hands of the Germans. On the one hand, Americans, as you know through association with us, deal with you as equals and as friends. Whatever faults we may have are on the surface and

do not come from the heart. In helping you, we naturally help ourselves, but we leave you free and untrammelled to work out your salvation. On the other hand, the Germans, by covert and insinuating methods will never stop until they have bound you hand and foot to their commercial chariot, and, once that is achieved, will never rest until you are under their complete domination.'

"Estrada, with a surprised look on his face, raised his hands; but Harding, who had now jumped to his feet and was pacing the floor, said:

" 'Wait a minute.' Then he continued: 'You, gentlemen, do not know the Germans as we do. To you Schwartz and his bank appear to be innocent and even attractive parts of the scenery of Aldaban. We Americans know better; we know the power behind Schwartz, and that he is not only a dangerous business rival to us, but a veritable menace to the safety and independence of Mescalita. You, Estrada, with all your shrewdness, have perhaps not realized that it is Schwartz who is mainly responsible for the trouble about our contract. Let me be frank with you, and I shall speak openly before Carlos and Henriquez, as they are close friends of all of us, and I hope will soon be closer.'

"Then, shaking his finger slowly at Estrada, he added:

" 'The beginning of the trouble was your, let us say, lack of skill in dividing the bonus per mile of ten thousand dollars. Schwartz took advantage of the situation and, lining up with those dissatisfied, has blocked the whole affair. And he blocked the contract not only

because he wished to prevent us from getting it, but because he hoped to get it himself. Still, he had a larger purpose in view. First, to get work for his bank and the interests behind it, and secondly,—and this is more important,—he did it to advance German interests at the expense of American interests. Schwartz is no fool. He has been here long enough to know the lay of the land. He knows as well as we all do that President Obregon has only a short lease of life and that a successor to him will soon be in power. He has found it difficult to deal with you, my friends, because of your honesty and patriotism; and with a German's love of base intrigue he has allied himself with Donna Elvira, and stands ready to further the interests of her brother, Don Eusebio Calderon.

“ ‘Now, gentlemen, you in whose veins flows the proud blood of old Spain must scorn to bow to the intrigues of a woman. I feel that I am right in saying that your manhood spurns such an idea, and it is without hesitation that we three Americans place ourselves in alliance with you against the enemies of Mescalita, and pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor to the cause of liberty and justice which stand before us, personified in that noble patriot, Don Emilio.’

“As this harangue was being made, Estrada's face was a study. At the first mention of Schwartz's name, he had started, and was about to speak, when silenced by Harding; but, as the talk proceeded, a look of satisfaction and conceited pride illumined his face. Carlos and Henriquez, though flattered by the appeal to their pride of race (they were both of mixed blood), were

somewhat taken aback when Harding named Estrada alone as a chief.

"Noticing their looks, Harding hastened to add:

" 'And it is to the valuable support of General Carlos and Henriquez that Don Emilio will owe the success awaiting him, and we feel sure that the destinies of this country will be safe in the hands of these three men. With Don Estrada as president, General Carlos as secretary of the treasury, and Henriquez as minister of public works, the prosperity of Mescalita is assured forever. Gentlemen, the battle is on, and the banner bearing the immortal words, "Liberatad, Igualidad, y Prosperidad," will lead us on to victory.'

"Perspiring with this unwonted oratorical effort, Harding sat down.

"Then, without letting the matter grow cold, Ladbrook broke in:

" 'You see, my friends, the confidence we have in you; for we have laid all our cards on the table face upward. We three Americans are here not only to make money, but we also take pride in assisting you, gentlemen, the leaders of public opinion in Mescalita to wake up this country.'

"Ladbrook looked at me. I had already made up my mind to see the matter through, cost what it might, and it was with real interest and pleasure that I slapped my hand on the table and began:

" 'For ten years my sword has been at the disposal of the defenders of liberty and progress in Spanish-American countries, and, as you doubtless know, my last enterprises were crowned with success, and good

government, order, and prosperity reign in two countries where plunder and disorganization were the watchwords before. I am an old hand at this game, and I gladly place myself and my experience at the disposal of this splendid cause. We have the necessary brains to win this fight and to place Don Emilio Estrada in power. What we must provide for now is a plan to meet the expenses of the campaign. When once we have decided on the means to that end, let us draw up our plan of action.'

"I stopped, and Harding said:

" 'Now, let's hear from you, gentlemen.'

"Don Emilio Estrada, with a careful look at the closed windows and doors, rose to his feet and, placing a hand upon a shoulder of his two compatriots, began in a low, but excited voice. As he proceeded, he waved his arms and paced the floor nervously, and his voice rang out in such clarion tones that we were forced to subdue his enthusiasm.

" 'My American friends, I feel that I can speak not only for my two compatriots and myself, but for all the well-intentioned citizens of this, my glorious country, when I say that I thank you for your gallant offer of aid, and announce that we accept it gladly. For years the situation in Mescalita has called for a strong hand and a more progressive and enlightened government. As an old friend and companion of President Obregon, I have been in every sense loyal to him—loyal in my heart, in my soul, and in my actions; but of late years, and particularly since his marriage to Donna Elvira, and since seeing the malign influence

she and her family wielded, my heart has been troubled and my love for my country has proved stronger than my affection for my old chief. I have tried to reason with him, but have met with impatient refusals to accept all counsels offered by me. Donna Elvira has treated me with contempt, and Don Eusebio has opposed my every wish. I agree with every word that my friend Harding has said about Schwartz, and I was only surprised to see that he was so familiar with the situation. Since Schwartz's arrival in Aldaban, I have felt his hostility behind every move of President Obregon's. And this recent act of his, this interference with our railroad contract, is the last straw. I have already talked the matter over with my friends Carlos and Henriquez, and we ourselves were about to propose to you a plan similar to the one which you have just begun to divulge. As regards funds, you may count on me for at least half a million dollars. This sum, even with what you three can raise, will not be enough, and I agree that we must get what more may be necessary from an American group strong enough not only to make our victory sure, but capable and willing to aid in the future development of Mescalita.

“ ‘My friends here must not be asked to contribute money, as they are in less fortunate circumstances than I am. They will aid us loyally with their brains and position, and before we go any further, I wish to say that I congratulate Mr. Harding upon his powers of divination, for I had long ago decided to make General Carlos secretary of the treasury and Don Henriquez the minister of public works.’

"He ceased, and, leaping to their feet, Carlos and Henriquez almost overwhelmed him with their embraces. He smilingly kissed them both and said:

" 'Gentlemen, it is growing late, but there is still time for us to talk a little about our plans.'

"Harding then took pencil and paper and said:

" 'If it is agreeable, gentlemen, I propose that Everett go to New York at the earliest opportunity and undertake to make connections with capitalists. He is a university man, and so would have a better chance of getting in touch with the right people than either Ladbrook or I.'

"This was agreed upon, and then Harding, turning to Estrada, said:

" 'Will you please give us the exact situation in this country, how many troops we can count upon, and what you can furnish in the way of arms and supplies?'

"Don Emilio said:

" 'Let General Carlos speak on that subject.'

"The latter, a small, swarthy man, past middle age, but full of nervous energy, hesitated for a moment and then, with a nervous little cough, said:

" 'Perhaps you know, gentlemen, that my father was one of the bitterest enemies that Obregon had. He was hereditary chief of the largest tribe in the country, a quasi-independent people who inhabit the mountain-ranges to the north. The Hualtecos are even now looked upon with suspicion by the powers that be. President Obregon made me secretary of war for the reason that he wished me near him in Aldaban, where he could watch me, and I am surrounded with spies, and almost

every employee in my department has been appointed without my being consulted. I am a mere figurehead, and have no real authority whatever; but I have kept my eyes open, and know virtually to a dot the number of regular troops, their state of efficiency, and the quantity of munitions at their disposal.

“ ‘The army of Mescalita is composed of twenty-five regiments of infantry, nominally one thousand each, but actually numbering less than a half of that figure. The cavalry is better organized, and there are five regiments of that arm—say four thousand men. As to the artillery, it is wretched. There are six regiments, two of the six light artillery, supplied with guns of an obsolete pattern, but for which the German 77’s have been ordered. These guns, four in a battery, and six batteries to a regiment, have not yet arrived; but the contract has been closed with Krupp, and they are expected in four or five months, along with half a million rounds of ammunition. This is a result of Schwartz’s work. I advocated buying the French 75’s. So you may say that, on a war basis, we have to count on twelve thousand infantry, four thousand cavalry, and about four thousand artillery,—say roughly, twenty thousand men. I say on a war basis, but it would take more than a year for Mescalita to get on that basis, and so we can limit the military opposition to our movement to perhaps fifteen thousand men, armed and drilled.

“ ‘At present the army is wretchedly officered, irregularly paid, poorly drilled, miserably clothed, and without discipline; for since President Obregon came to power, twenty years ago, Mescalita has been at peace,

and he has seen to it that the military establishment was kept up merely as a matter of form. But there is one really effective force, and that is the *Rurales*, or mounted police, which numbers two thousand five hundred men, and has lately been put under the charge of Don Eusebio Calderon. They are officered by ex-bandits and ruffians who have seen the wisdom of taking regular pay and working comfortably inside the law rather than eking out a precarious existence as leaders of small bands of marauders.

" 'Now, although President Obregon has prevented me from visiting my people, the Hualtecos, for many years, my influence is strong with them. If they were supplied with arms, I could organize them, and believe that we should soon have twenty thousand hardy mountaineers at our disposal. But what we really need is five hundred Americans of the cowboy type. With these added to my Hualtecos, we could sweep the country, I am sure.'

"Harding turned to me and asked:

" 'Do you think, Bill, that you could get as many adventurers as the general wants? Five hundred seems to me a pretty tall order.'

" 'Give me a little time and plenty of money, and I'll get them,' I replied; 'but I must be sure of the money first.'

"Don Emilio, who did not seem to take a deep interest in General Carlos's remarks, now said:

" 'Talking of money, it occurs to me that we might make some use of that twenty millions of *bonos exteriores*. I refer to the issue of bonds placed abroad

by Obregon when he came in to power twenty years ago, and which have not paid any interest for the last ten years. They were recently quoted at twenty-one cents on the dollar. I believe they are held principally in Holland. Perhaps we could get these bondholders together and induce them to throw a little good money after bad. By promising them all back interest, and compounded at that, I think we could get them interested.'

"Harding shook his head.

" 'In the first place,' he said, 'it would take too long to reach these bondholders; and, secondly, I count on those bonds to interest capital in New York. We must not weaken Everett's hand. This movement is going to cost at least two, and probably three, million dollars. We hope that Everett can raise the larger part of that in New York, and it should not be difficult; for against this advance we can give all sorts of concessions that would pay back the amount of the loan many times. But first we have got to raise here, among ourselves, enough money to start the enterprise. Don Estrada, how much can you give and when can you give it? For this money that we contribute must be spent here, and we must begin spending it soon.'

"Estrada said:

" 'I have already promised you half a million dollars. You can count upon that in a week from to-day, and perhaps more, if necessary. How much can you three Americans raise?'

" 'We can put in three hundred thousand dollars at once, and if Everett can borrow on the four hundred

thousand interim certificates, that sum will be thrown in, too.'

"Ten days later I arrived in New York. I have been trying for a week to raise money on the interim certificates. I went first to old Baxter, the head of the Collateral Trust Co., the old ruffian you saw me quarreling with just before I met you. He turned me down, and I have had no luck anywhere else. I believe the old rascal has given orders to the banks not to deal with me."

Wallace stretched himself and opened his eyes. Looking at his watch, he said:

"Dine with me to-night, Bill. Meet me at the Waldorf at eight. I think I have your number, and that I have a number to match it. I'll have good news for you at dinner-time. Till then good-by."

"Well, John, you certainly have cheered me up, if only by listening to me patiently. I'll see you at eight." Putting on his coat, Everett left the room.

The door had hardly closed behind him when Wallace picked up the red telephone and, without asking for a number, said in a low voice:

"Are you there, Walter?"

"Yes," came the answer, almost immediately.

John Wallace's voice became louder and even a little excited in tone as he went on:

"I've struck just the thing you want at last. It looks a cinch to me. I'll be with you in twenty minutes."

CHAPTER III

PRECISELY at five-thirty John Wallace rang the bell at the side entrance of a house standing on the northwest corner of Twelfth Street and Second Avenue.

The house was a large one, and built solidly of brownstone. In the rear, concealed behind a high brick wall, was a spacious garden extending half-way to Third Avenue. The "house of Acklom," as it was called, built in the late fifties of the last century, was stamped with the solid respectability and even luxury that went with that period. Now it seemed strangely out of place in its surroundings, where small shops, warehouses, hospitals, and cheap apartments formed the neighborhood. The guides on the sight-seeing automobiles, which night and day passed it on their way to Chinatown and the Bowery, never failed to bawl through their megaphones:

"Here is the house of Acklom, one of the richest men in New York. The oldest family in New York. The owner is always away traveling; said to be a sick man; but he owns blocks of property in this neighborhood."

Wallace was admitted by a sturdily-built man in black, who looked more like a prize-fighter than a butler, and was led through a narrow passage, across a square hall lighted from above.

"Come in," rang out a high, clear voice in answer to his rap on the door.

The room which Wallace entered seemed strangely out of place in a city home. It was evidently an extension to the main building, and was lighted from the roof. Forty feet in length and twenty-five feet wide, its size did not impress one as it should. Its walls were fifteen feet high, and for more than half their height two of them were covered with large and recent maps of all corners of the earth. Above the maps ran a narrow gallery, and from this to the roof rose a wall of books, evidently relating to the countries pictured on the maps below. To the right of the door, and at the end of the room touching the house, was a flat-top desk with two telephones, one red in color. To the left of the desk stood a high, dark screen, which looked like a blot against the white wall, here free from books. This concealed a door. In the middle of the room was a long table covered with papers of all sorts, and around it were placed several light, but easy, chairs. Behind the desk, clad in light-colored flannels, sat a tall, thin, bearded man, his eyes covered by a dark-blue spectacles.

Wallace, without a word, drew a chair from the table and sat down in front of the desk.

"Well, Walter," he said, "our new private telephone seems to work well, and I am glad it does, for we shall need it in the next few weeks."

Walter Acklom did not look like an invalid. His tall, spare form was upright and seemed full of nervous strength, which was emphasized by the muscular hand resting on the desk. His strong, black beard and his

thick, close-cut hair betokened high vitality. His voice was clear and resonant and particularly cheerful in tone. The blue spectacles alone hinted at the least disability; indeed, his eyes were the only weak part of his make-up.

Acklom was in his fortieth year, the only son of very rich parents who had died in his early childhood. The great accumulations incident to his long minority had made him at twenty-one one of the richest young men in the world. His family, of Dutch origin, dated from the days of Peter Stuyvesant. They had never sold a foot of their original holdings and what had originally been a little farm of somewhat more than one hundred acres was now covered with valuable buildings, each of which yielded a comfortable little income, and, taken together, provided a revenue of more than four million dollars.

Acklom had been brought up by a guardian, his mother's brother, an old bachelor of eccentric, but sound, character. He had provided his ward with the best of tutors and had sent him to a good school and, when the time came, to a university. "Uncle John," as Walter called him, had wished to make a statesman of the boy, and, beginning with Plutarch's Lives, had filled his head full of the deeds of ancient and modern heroes. The effect of this teaching was not exactly what the old man had designed.

Acklom, though sufficiently impressed by the character and achievements of the heroes aforesaid, was more interested in the different countries which had been the theater of their deeds.

He was filled with the curiosity to see those lands, and after his uncle's death, on reaching his majority, he left the university without waiting for his degree and plunged at once into travel and exploration. While at the university he had studied physical geography, engineering, history, and languages, and he had been a fairly good student, and therefore entered upon his chosen career well fitted to make it a success. He had had no business training, but an inherited common sense stood as a barrier between him and useless extravagance. Generous to a fault, he yet resisted being made a dupe of; possessed of vast wealth, he knew himself to be an object of no slight envy, and he decided not to increase that envy by becoming a man of great affairs in his own country. He decided upon a life of useful, and, if possible, exciting adventures.

He had now spent nearly twenty years in exploring the less-known and more-inaccessible portions of the earth's surface. Wherever he went, he identified himself with the people, and left behind him countless friends of all nationalities, many of whom did not know his real name and were absolutely ignorant as to his condition, though they were drawn to him by his evident manliness, kindness, courage, and physical charm.

Acklom faced the world with a simple code, and lived up to it. This was to do something to the utmost of his capacity. If the good was obvious, to do it; if it was not clear exactly what was good or what was evil, to do what one pleased and to do it hard; and, perhaps, if God willed it, what seemed evil would turn out to

be good. Activity, slightly colored by a certain sense of social fitness, was his God, and he worshiped it.

But in his voyaging for adventure a dreadful blow had fallen upon him and six months ago he had been forced to abandon his travels by failing eyesight.

He was in China when the disability overtook him, and he had at once hastened to New York, to place himself under the care of a specialist. He had such a horror of physical disability that he dreaded lest his ailment should become known, and thus had traveled secretly, like a thief in the night. Even the fact that he had arrived in New York and had been living for several months in his home was known to no one but his household, his oculist, and his friend Wallace, and these were all pledged to secrecy.

John Wallace was one of the few relatives that Acklom had living. He was his third cousin on his mother's side of the house. He, too, had become an orphan early in life, and Acklom had looked after his career, sending him to school and university and having him study law. Then, apparently from some whim, he had established Wallace in his little office downtown, given him an income of twelve thousand dollars a year, and asked him to wait orders. For nearly ten years Wallace had visited his office every week-day except during the summer months, and had been occupied with the light labor of administering the well-ordered and numerous charities of his patron.

After his first inspection, the oculist had told Acklom to live quietly in his home and submit to a daily treatment that was somewhat painful in character. This en-

forced idleness had nearly driven Acklom to the verge of nervous breakdown. To distract himself from his troubles, he had sent for Wallace and had told him to keep his eyes open and see if he could not find some interesting adventure in which Acklom might play a leading part without appearing in the game in order that he might have amusement and occupation even while strictly obeying the orders of his oculist.

Wallace's meeting with Everett and the story of Everett's troubles seemed to give promise of a real adventure. Hence the message on the private telephone and Wallace's presence in Acklom's house. Acklom, having filled his pipe and lighted it, pushed a box of cigars toward Wallace and said:

"I am glad you have found something which you think will interest me, for I am bored to tears."

"Well, Walter," said Wallace, "you know I had a long talk with Doctor Foosa the other day, and he told me emphatically that, if you would master your impatience and submit loyally to his treatment, he could almost guarantee you a perfect cure. He counts on me to keep you interested. Well, I think the gods have been good to us, for to-day I can lay before you a scheme that will interest you night and day and give free rein to your mental activity."

"All right," said Acklom. "Go ahead with the story."

And Wallace, placing on the desk his unlighted cigar and leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes closed, began. His memory

was excellent, and he repeated almost word for word what Everett had told him, winding up by saying:

"I dine with the boy to-night at eight. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him nothing," said Acklom, "but bring him here after dinner. If I like the man's looks, I'll go into the game. Even if I am to be 'the man behind' and to keep out of sight, which I agree is the best plan, I must see one of the men in the movement. You need not tell him who I am at first; say simply that you think you have found somebody who can help him, and, of course, swear him to secrecy."

Shortly before ten that evening a cab dropped Wallace and Everett at Acklom's door, and the same aggressive-looking servant led them without delay into Acklom's presence.

He was sitting behind the desk, as in the afternoon, but the room looked different. Heavy black shades had been drawn across the glass roof, and the walls looked more somber, except where a strong light threw its beams on a map of Central America. This light and a green-shaded drop-light on the desk were the only ones in the room.

The two men bowed on entering the door, which was closed sharply after them by the servant. Acklom was clad in evening dress, and his white shirt-front threw into somber relief his black-bearded visage, which was rendered almost forbidding by the addition of the large dark spectacles he wore.

Without speaking, Wallace drew up two chairs to

within a few feet of the desk behind which Acklom sat, and the two men took their seats.

Acklom spoke, addressing his words to Everett:

"From what Wallace has said of you, I have decided to trust you fully, and I introduce myself to you as Walter Acklom, of whom you have doubtless heard. I make only one request: that you keep our acquaintance absolutely secret and that I am in any way cognizant of your affairs or interested in them. With this understanding, we can proceed to discuss matters."

Everett bowed and said:

"Mr. Acklom, I am pleased to know you. I have often heard of you and of your wonderful travels and have read some of your books. You may count upon my absolute secrecy, and you may believe me when I say that if you go into this affair with me and my friends, I shall see to it that your interests are looked after as well as my own."

Acklom bowed.

"Wallace has told me your story, Everett," he said, "and the matter interests me, first, because in my enforced idleness your affair will serve as a distraction; secondly, because I am a good American and am always glad to further American interests in any part of the globe; and, thirdly, because it will give me the keenest pleasure to frustrate any German plans. That country is our enemy. Lastly, from what I know of the Government of Mescalita, a change is necessary there; and as, unfortunately, in Spanish-American countries, a change can take place only by means of a revolution, a revolution let it be."

Acklom paused to light a cigarette, and then said:

"Now to work. If you will bring here to-morrow your four hundred thousand dollars' worth of interim silver certificates, I will cash them at their face-value, minus ten per cent. I realize that they have at present small value, as the bonds for which they call have not yet been printed, and, from your story, it appears that the present Government of Mescalita will never print them. By cashing the certificates, I not only give you funds, but I prove to you that I link myself to your enterprise and intend to see it through to a successful conclusion.

"In exchange for my aid, I wish a prior claim upon all mineral rights and all forestry rights, on the basis that I turn over to the Government ten per cent. of the net proceeds. Also the handling of foreign loans, past and present, and the right to construct any public works which may be undertaken. I agree, however, that the first work must be the completion of the railroad your group has begun, and also the works at Cruz Chico, in which works I shall have no personal interest. After these works are completed, I wish to be given the first chance to control any enterprise in Mescalita. I understand, Everett, that you are empowered to make any contract you see fit. If that is so, Wallace can draw up a short contract according to the terms I have mentioned, and we can sign it to-night."

"I have the power," said Everett. He produced a document signed and sealed with the official stamp of Mescalita. The signatures were those of Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez, who were respectively named as being

actually the president, secretary of the treasury, and secretary of public works of Mescalita. With this paper was a power of attorney from Harding and Ladbrook.

Acklom looked these papers over and said:

"As I am the only person with whom the Government is to deal, I shall ask you to let me keep these documents." Without waiting for an answer he placed them in a drawer of his desk.

Everett, a little surprised at Acklom's quick decision, said:

"All right. We shall deal only with you from now on; therefore you may keep the documents. Some day you may have one of them framed, for it will have historical interest."

Wallace was engaged in drawing up the contract.

Acklom rose and said:

"Come along, Everett. Let's do a little geography," and led him to the map of Central America hanging on the wall, brightly lighted by a reflector.

When seated, Acklom had not given a true idea as to his height and size; but as he stalked across the room, he seemed enormous and quite towered over Everett, who was by no means a small man. His wide shoulders, his gaunt, loosely-hung frame, his somewhat stooping carriage, his long arms swinging as he walked, gave him the appearance of taking up too much space even in the large room.

On reaching the map, Acklom placed a long finger in the center of Mescalita and said:

"You have here two sea-coasts, east and west, but I propose to use neither of them. To the north, lies Pul-

queria, a country in which I have interests. I intend to operate from there. I can make satisfactory arrangements with the Government of Pulqueria, and the American force, which, I take it, you will command, will enter Mescalita from there; and, joining up with the Hualtecos under General Carlos, march against Aldaban. Once that town falls into our hands, the game is won. The question now is to find the five hundred Americans. I will give you letters, and send telegrams to some friends of mine, and I fancy you will have no difficulty in that matter. Be ready to start west in a few days' time!"

So saying, he marched abruptly to his desk and sat down. Wallace presented the contract to Acklom, who read it carefully and passed it to Everett, who signed it. Wallace witnessed it.

"Now," said Acklom, "of course, no one is yet being watched, but it is just as well that you exercise caution in coming to see me. Except when summoned, you need not come here at all and you can transact all necessary business with Wallace. If I want to see you, I will let Wallace know, and he will show you a way of getting to me without being observed."

Wallace seemed surprised at Acklom's words, but before he could speak, Acklom gave him a quick look and, turning to Everett, said:

"You will understand, my young friend, that I am reposing complete confidence in you, and I feel it is not misplaced."

So saying, he rang a bell, and the servant who had let them in entered.

"Everett, this is Hank Bollard, my confidential man.

Hank, Mr. Everett is to be let into the house whenever he calls, even by the back way. Call in the other boys and let them have a look at him, so they will know him when they see him."

Bollard went out, and shortly returned with a Chinaman and an Arab. These men were not in native costumes, but were neatly clothed in ordinary dark suits and looked, in New York at least, with its mixed population, in no way remarkable.

Bollard, putting his hands on their shoulders, said:

"Take a good look at this gentleman. He is Mr. Everett, our friend."

"That will do," said Acklom, and the three men left the room as silently as they had entered it. Shaking hands with Wallace and Everett, Acklom said to Wallace: "Show him out the back way."

CHAPTER IV

SO saying, Acklom opened a door behind the screen near his desk and disappeared. The closing of the door plunged the room in darkness; but Wallace, striking a match, led the way to where, on the wall, hung a map of the United States. Lifting this and pressing a button, a door opened, and they found themselves in the garden behind the house, which was almost in total darkness, being but dimly lighted by the rays from the few windows on the opposite side of the street. Low growls greeted their entrance into the garden; but these were stilled by Wallace's voice, and two large boar-hounds came frolicking about him. The men entered what appeared to be a trellised arbor covered with close-growing vines, which led them to a door in the middle of the high brick wall inclosing the garden, opposite the rear of the house. Opening this door, they entered a narrow covered passage, and, walking for some distance, came to another door, where Wallace pressed an electric button and waited till it swung back on its hinges. This door gave on the back yard of a saloon situated in the middle of the block on Third Avenue.

As they entered the yard, a gruff voice called:

"Who's there?"

"John," said Wallace. "Is that you, Mike?"

"Yes," came the reply.

"Come here," said Wallace. "I want to introduce you to Mr. Everett. He has the right of way. We'll take a seat in the club-room, Mike. Fetch some drinks and join us there."

What Wallace called the club-room was an extension nearly filling the back yard of the saloon, being perhaps twenty feet square. It had neither windows nor skylight, but was lit by lamps hung from the ceiling, and ventilated by pipes running up the side of the house, so that it was virtually sound-proof. By the aid of the lights one could distinguish on the walls many cheap prints of prize-fighters, race-horses, fighting-cocks, and dogs of all breeds. In the center was a circular pit where many a main of cocks had been fought, and which in the old days had been the scene of many a famous dog-fight. Around this pit were scattered chairs and tables, at one of which the two men sat down. They had hardly done so when Mike entered, bearing a tray.

Mike was a little fellow with fiery red hair and a red beard tinged with gray. His apron alone betokened his calling. With his shaven upper lip, he looked more like a coachman, and such indeed he had been, having served in that capacity for many years during the life of Acklom's father and during the youth of the son. Acklom, on coming of age, had pensioned him off and put him in charge of this saloon, which served as a back and secret entrance to his house.


Acklom owned the entire block and by taking off a few feet from the back yards of the houses in the rear of the garden, he had made a covered passageway between the saloon and his garden.

Mike had not only been the coachman, but also the sporting tutor of Acklom. He had taught him to box, ride, drive, and even to know the fine points of fighting chickens and dogs. His saloon was a meeting-place of all sorts and conditions of sporting men, and his acquaintance was of the widest among gentry of that kidney. He fairly worshiped Acklom, was entirely faithful to his interests, and, among other things, had entire charge of Acklom's garden and the dogs and other animals inhabiting it.

When Mike had placed their drinks before them and gone away, Wallace said:

"Now, Bill, you are one of the few that know some of the secrets of the house of Acklom. It's a great idea, having this back entrance through the saloon. Mike has a pull with the police, so it is open day and night; and as he or one of his two sons is always on deck, those in the know—and they are few—can always get in to the house without being seen. Mike and his family are really a part of Acklom's household. His wife and daughter are the only servants in the house besides the three men that you saw this evening. Mike's wife is the cook, and his daughter the chambermaid.

"Hank Bollard is Acklom's body-servant. Acklom picked him up in the West before he came of age. He had led a varied existence, having served an enlistment in the U. S. cavalry, and had been a miner as well as a cowboy. He is about fifty years old and as sound as a roach, neither drinks nor smokes, and is a dead shot with revolver and rifle. He has been with Acklom in all his travels, and is as much a companion as a servant.



"The black man, Hussein Murzouk, is not a negro, but a native of Fezzan, in the Sahara, and is a son of the chief of one of the prominent tribes of that country. Acklom found him in Cairo fifteen years ago.

"Fong Yung, the Chinaman, completes the outfit. He has been with Acklom for ten years, and, being a Mohammedan, gets on perfectly well with Hussein. He is said to belong to a good family in China, and he claims that his father was one of the leaders of the Tai Ping Rebellion. These two men vie with Bollard in their devotion to Acklom's interests." Wallace looked at his watch:

"Now, let's go and get some sleep, Bill. Meet me in this room to-morrow at ten o'clock."

So saying, he rapped softly on the table and Mike entered.

"As you let us out, Mike, introduce your two boys to Mr. Everett, so that they may know him. He is going to use this entrance pretty often, and, to begin with, he and I will meet here to-morrow at ten o'clock."

So saying, they followed Mike through a dimly lighted passageway which, avoiding the saloon, led them to the family entrance. On the way Mike introduced his two sons, stalwart youths of about thirty years of age, whose battered faces spoke of none too easy lives, but were redeemed by the honest glances from their bold, blue eyes.

As agreed upon, Wallace and Everett met in Mike's place at ten o'clock, and without wasting time hastened to Acklom's garden.

The aspect of the place by day was charming indeed. It covered quite a quarter of the block. The high brick walls surrounding it were hidden with ivy. It was cut in the middle by the trellised-covered path extending from the rear wall to Acklom's house. On one side of the trellis, in large cages, were many species of birds, and on the other, in comfortable hutches with large runways, was a considerable menagerie of animals in pairs: foxes, coyotes, prairie-dogs, and even a couple of small cinnamon bears. About the middle of the arbor, and a few feet away, rose a large and thick-spreading horse-chestnut-tree. Under this were placed a table and several easy-chairs, in one of which sat Acklom.

At his feet, lay the two boar-hounds. Looking at the whole picture, one would never suppose that it was placed below Fourteenth Street, in one of the most crowded districts of New York.

"I suppose you have brought the certificates?" were Acklom's first words.

Everett produced them and, turning to Wallace, Acklom said:

"Exchange to-day makes a *peso* worth forty-three cents; so the four hundred thousand dollars' worth of silver certificates, minus ten per cent., is equivalent to \$154,800 U. S. currency, and you can pay that sum over to Everett to-day."

So saying, having counted them, he put the certificates into his pocket.

Everett started to express his thanks, but Acklom, waving them aside with a vigorous motion of his hand, said:

"This is no charity, my friend. I intend to make this enterprise pay." Then, with a smile, he added: "Not that I need to make money; but I have sufficient inherited business sense to appreciate its value, if for no other reason than that in these days no one respects a man careless in money matters. I generally make my whims pay in one way or another. In this case I look for both pleasure and profit. I am prepared to put all that is necessary into this enterprise."

Then, turning to Wallace, he said:

"How much have you in hand, John?"

"Nearly two million dollars," Wallace replied. "And there is a lot coming in on the first of the month."

"That will be enough to start with," said Acklom. "Now," he continued, "this is the first time I have ever financed a revolution and kept out of it personally. I have often taken sides for or against the government of the locality where I was, if it appeared necessary to do so; but in these cases I was on the spot, saw the immediate necessity for my action, and had the fun of playing an active part.

"I am familiar enough with Spanish-American countries to be convinced that a revolution which will place in power intelligent, sufficiently honest, and progressive men can do nothing but good, notwithstanding the blood shed, and this seems to be particularly true of Mescalita.

"As I said, I intend to make this enterprise pay; but that does not mean that I wish to make simply a financial profit out of it. Once I am reimbursed for the first cost of the enterprise, what profits I may make out of the concessions I am to receive from the Government of

Mescalía I intend to spend in the organization of schools throughout the country. In these schools not only a primary education will be given, but trades will be taught. Then in Aldabán I shall found a university where the clever pupils of the primary schools may perfect their education, and eventually aid in the government of their country. If this is done, and if I live it will be, Mescalía will in a generation be on the high road toward civilization and become a model for all Spanish-American countries.

“By doing this I am not only helping Mescalía, but my own country as well; for when the Panama Canal is finished, the United States must control it, as it will become, at least in a geographical sense, the southern boundary of the United States. I do not mean that we shall be forced to annex the countries lying between Texas and the canal, but I mean that for our own safety and to safeguard our civilization we shall be forced to see to it that these Spanish-American countries be sufficiently well governed; that they become intelligent enough to look toward us alone for guidance, and not fall under either European or Asiatic influence. That is the essence of the Monroe Doctrine, let others explain it as they may.

“Now, Everett, you may understand why I go into this enterprise with a clear conscience. Wallace tells me that there is an old bond issue of twenty million pesos that is principally held abroad and was last quoted at twenty-one. I have no doubt that some of these bonds are held here in New York, and as interest has not been paid for many years, they could be got for

very little. I want you, John, to pick up all you can of these bonds as quietly and quickly as possible, and when we get enough of them in our hands, we can make a few wash sales on the curb and push them down to a still lower figure. You can start this, John, to-day. You must know some of the curb-brokers."

"All right," replied Wallace.

"At the same time you can place privately with Walker, the confidential man, of the Momo Arms Company, an order for twenty thousand repeating-carbines and ten machine-guns, together with three million rounds of ammunition and one thousand forty-five caliber single-action Colt revolvers, with one hundred thousands rounds of ammunition for them. Explain to Walker that you want these packed, first in parcels weighing one hundred pounds each, and then have ten of these parcels placed in a packing-case and the lot delivered six weeks from to-day at their headquarters in San Disco, where they will be called for.

"Now, John, you can go downtown to attend to the matter of the bonds and the arms. In regard to the latter, you may have complete confidence in Walker. He is accustomed to this sort of business, and a verbal contract will do with him. Pay him fifty per cent. of the price on giving the order, and tell him he will get the rest on the arrival of the goods in San Disco."

Wallace started to go, and Everett rose with him.

"If you don't mind," said Acklom, "I'd like you, Everett, to stay and have a chat. We have a lot of things to talk over."

"With pleasure," said Everett, and reseated himself.

"Wallace tells me that you have spent some ten years in the revolutionary business," began Acklom. "In this time you must have got to know men who would be useful in this movement."

"Well," said Everett, "most of the enterprises I have been engaged in were organized in a more or less haphazard way, and we were always short of funds, so that the class of men we used was not of the best. However, there were six good fellows in the lot, and we can count on them, for they are at work on the railroad near Cruz Chico. The best of all my revolutionary pals is Wesley Harding, who, with Ladbroke, runs the bank at Aldaban. He is a high-class man.

"If you let me make a suggestion, Mr. Acklom, I think it would be a good plan to leave both these men in Aldaban. They can keep the bank open, and are clever enough to avoid suspicion until the moment is ripe for the capture of the city. Although I trust Estrada, he will go to pieces at the crucial moment if he has not a gringo to steady him. And those six boys will be needed at Cruz Chico; for, when things start, we shall have to prevent Obregon's crowd from getting help from the outside, and Cruz Chico is the only point they would use to import arms. Another thing, we've got to have good men in Mescalita to prevent Schwartz and his crowd from getting in those Krupp guns they have ordered. So, if you agree with me, we'll have to depend on the U. S. A. to furnish all of the five hundred, their leaders included."

"All right," said Acklom; "but give me the names of the six men at Cruz Chico."

Everett did so, and added:

"The best of this lot is Ellison, the bookkeeper. If you say so, we'll make him chief at that end."

Acklom put the list into his pocket and, throwing away his cigar and reaching for a pad and pencil, began to write. Having finished a few notes, he again took up the conversation.

"I suppose you have arranged a cipher with Harding," he said. "If so, you can wire him that the business has started and that he must get his wife and Mrs. Ladbrook out of the country. On the whole, I think the best plan is to arrange for Harding to bring up the two ladies, so that we can have a talk with him. Not that *I* shall see him, for it is understood that I remain completely in the background."

Everett nodded, and said:

"Wallace will get on well with Harding, I am sure."

"Now," said Acklom, "I am going to take a nap, as I always do after lunch. You can either do the same, or I'll ring and get you a magazine to read. Cigars are on the table. Wallace should be here within the hour, and I'll wake when he comes."

"Never mind the magazine," said Everett.

"Well," said Acklom, yawning. "I'll sleep."

So saying, he arranged himself comfortably in the long-chair and closed his eyes.

Wallace had hardly returned when Acklom, stretching his arms, said:

"Well, John, what news?"

"I have seen Walker of the Momo Arms Company," Wallace replied. "He did not ask any questions; says

he'll fill the order, and took two hundred and fifty thousand dollars off me. I am on the track of the Mescalita bonds, and expect to have some to-morrow morning. You are right about the majority of them being held in Europe. Virtually the whole issue is in the hands of a Jewish group in Amsterdam. I got Butler, a curb-broker friend of mine, to find the correspondents of the holders in New York, and he says that we can get ten thousand of the bonds at twenty-one right here in Wall Street, and the whole lot at the same price if we care to cable for them."

"All right," said Acklom; "get those ten thousand the first thing in the morning. When we get moving, we shall start a campaign on the curb against them, and I'll bet we'll get the lot for ten cents on the dollar."

He turned to Everett.

"How soon can Harding and the ladies get here?" he asked.

"To-day is Friday," replied Everett. "There is a steamer due to leave Cruz Chico on Thursday. Barring accidents, then, they should be here well inside a fortnight."

"All right," said Acklom. "Send your cipher cable at once, and let Wallace know the answer you receive. Except that I shall take steps toward getting the five hundred men, we can do nothing until Harding arrives. I shan't need you till then, but keep in touch with Wallace. We'll call this a day's work. So, good-by, Everett, till I send for you."

CHAPTER V

ON their arrival at the bank Saturday morning, Harding and Ladbrook found Everett's cable awaiting them.

When decoded, it read as follows:

"Matter arranged. Without fail expect Harding sail with two ladies next steamer. Continue railroad work half force. Fake cable illness mother-in-law follows. Answer."

The cable was unsigned.

The two men looked at each other and silently shook hands. Harding spoke first:

"We were right in sending Bill Everett. Neither you nor I, Dick, could have pulled off this trick in such quick time." He rubbed his hands. "This banking business is all right, but it is an old man's game, after all. I am glad for a little real excitement once more. Now, about breaking the news to the girls. Vi will take it quietly enough, but will you have as easy a time moving Margaret, Dick? She loves it here, and she may kick at having to leave you. Of course we haven't told them our plans, but I know my wife suspects something; and Margaret is too clever not to feel that there is a game on."

Before Ladbrook could reply, a boy brought in another cable, which said in plain English:

"Violet's mother very ill; wants her daughter at once."

It was signed "Everett."

"This," said Harding, with a laugh, "is the *fake* cable all right, for Violet's mother has been dead ten years! It's lucky that these Hidalgos never inquire into one's family affairs, or this cable would be a wasted effort."

"It will do all right for Violet," said Ladbroke, "but it doesn't help me with Margaret. She loves it here, and I'll have a hard time getting her to go. Bring Violet with you to lunch to-day, Wesley, and we'll thrash the matter out then. But before we meet, we must frame up some story that will interest Margaret."

"I have it," said Harding. "I'll get Violet to complain of heart trouble,—you know, she had an attack two years ago,—and say that I am taking her to visit a New York physician. She will beg Margaret to accompany her, and you can bait the hook, so to speak, by promising her a large sum to spend on dresses and hats."

Violet Harding fell in with her husband's idea of a short New York visit. Suddenly turning to him and placing her hands on his shoulder, she said impetuously:

"It is splendid that Margaret is going, for the journey may give her a change of ideas. I have been frightened lately by the thought that she is interested in Don Eusebio. You know, he rides by her house daily, and even when I am with her she makes some excuse to be at the window when he passes. I do not believe that they have ever met, and I hope not, for I know Don Eusebio is the worst enemy you and Dick have in

Mescalita. I do not believe for a moment there is anything wrong about Margaret, but, you know, her bringing up was very different from mine. She considers herself thrown away here in Aldaban."

"Good God!" broke in Harding, "I hope there is nothing in this story about Don Eusebio. He is against us heart and soul, and if Dick Ladbroke suspected that anything was going on, he would shoot him on sight, and this would mess up our affairs for good and all. We can't get Margaret out of here too quick, and I count on you to make her willing to go. But come, if we are going to the Ladbroke to lunch."

When they reached the Ladbroke's, opening a little postern cut in one side of the great mahogany doors, they entered the patio.

What a delicious contrast it presented to the glaring, sandy road they had just left, where silence struggled with heat for the mastery! A little fountain played in the middle, and under the thick-topped palms, which excluded every ray of sunlight, numerous birds were singing in many cages, their music dominated by the sweet, flute-like notes of the *clarin*, than which no sweeter songster exists.

Shutting the postern behind them, a soft-toned bell gave out three notes, which announced their presence and stilled for a moment the music of the birds. They crossed the patio and, mounting a flight of easy steps, found themselves on a wide veranda, where the table for luncheon was already set. A native boy, crouched on his heels, pulled rhythmically at the rope of a punkah,

or huge tropical fan, the breeze from which moved lazily the tall, bright-colored flowers adorning the table.

Without ceremony, Violet started to enter the door opposite, but stopped as the sound of a high, shrill voice reached her ears. It was Margaret speaking, and she said:

"I won't go to New York just because, for some reason, you want to get rid of me. You know we had planned to go together in the winter, when a change of climate would do me good. I hate New York in summer, and this new interest that you are taking in my clothes is ridiculous. This is the first time you have ever wasted a thought on my dress, and it is so sudden that it looks suspicious to me."

"Now, now, Margaret," answered Ladbrook's quiet voice, "you know it is not only the clothes; but Violet has a return of her old heart trouble, and Wesley is nervous about her and wants you specially to travel with her. Don't make such a row, anyway. You heard the bell, and that means that the Hardings are in the patio and perhaps even on the veranda."

The next moment Margaret caught sight of Violet standing in the doorway, and, running forward impulsively, grasped her arm and said:

"You poor dear! What is this story about your heart? Come, let us sit down at the table, and you can tell me all about it. No, sit next to me. Let the men sit together."

She seemed very nervous and excited. Her color was heightened, and her voice, at no time particularly sweet, sounded strident and almost harsh.

Violet told, with many details, the story of her heart ailment, and Margaret, at first suspicious, finally changed abruptly into an advocate of the journey, declaring, however, that she would stay at longest only a fortnight in the United States. This would mean an absence of a month from Aldaban.

So the luncheon, after all, passed off pleasantly, and the two men left the house in high spirits.

Shortly before four o'clock Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez turned up at the bank. The door was locked, and the five conspirators sat down to discuss their plans. Harding read the telegram from Everett. It had a galvanic effect upon the three ministers, who knew now that the pleasant planning in this comfortable back-room would cease, and stern action would be required of them, with all its attendant risks and hardship. Estrada even turned a little pale, and from his dark eyes shot a glance of almost fear at the two Americans; for he realized that, at last count, he would be forced to obey their orders, and their firmness of will and restless activity would cause him many an uncomfortable moment. True, he would benefit by every move they made, but his Spanish-American heart resented the fact that the Yankees would play the tune to which he must dance. Neither he nor his friends lacked courage, and they did not fear the risks they were about to run, but they dreaded being forced to carry out plans exactly and promptly, and not to work in the haphazard manner of their race.

Having read the telegram, Harding continued:

"Knowing Everett as I do, I know that he has put

his hands upon a large enough sum of money to see the enterprise through. Therefore it is up to us to make our final plans. I shall sail with my wife and Mrs. Ladbrook on Thursday. She really is suffering from her heart, and it would be well for you, my friends, to spread the story of her illness this evening, so that when I make my visit of adieu to the president, he will not be surprised or suspicious. You may add that we have no intention of remaining longer than a fortnight in New York. Ladbrook will, of course, be here, and I shall be back in less than a month."

"Then, we have not to act at once," Estrada broke in with relief in his voice. "We've got at least a month of rest before us."

The Americans smiled, and nodded acquiescence.

Then Ladbrook, turning to Carlos, who of the three had seemed most pleased by the news, said:

"What news of your Hualtecos?"

"Good," replied Carlos. "A messenger came in last night and told me that my nephew had passed the word through the tribe to organize quietly. This they are doing with joy, though the movement is not apparent, for I doubt if Obregon has able spies. In a month's time my family will surely have twenty thousand men. What we lack are carbines."

"You can count on them," declared Harding. "Everett is too old a revolutionary hand not to have arranged that the first thing. What I want to know is the situation here in Aldaban."

The three ministers exchanged glances, and Estrada spoke:

"Obregon is really ill, and his doctor is keeping me posted as to his condition. He says that he doubts if the president will last more than a month or two, though he is doing his best to keep him alive, for I have promised him thirty thousand dollars if he staves off the old man's death for three months. Donna Elvira and her brother Eusebio are working in behalf of the latter throughout the country, but the movement lacks energy. However, Don Eusebio is in almost daily communication with Schwartz and, I fancy, is relying very largely on the Krupp batteries to bring him into power. Eusebio is a brave man, but his very courage works in our favor, for, in his arrogance, he makes light of opposition. He feels that he has the majority of the younger land-owning classes on his side. This is true, for his avowed hatred of everything American has brought to him most of the restless spirits; but they are hot-headed and jealous of one another, and I am sure that the older men will look askance upon a young man's movement. I feel sure that if we are able to strike a first good blow, we shall have them on our side almost to a man."

"Now," said Harding, "it seems to me that all you have to do until I return is to keep well informed of the movements of Don Eusebio's party. You know best what to do toward bringing the army on our side, but knowing the venality of the officers, it seems to me there is no hurry about buying them. We can act on this matter after my return. The only danger is the chance of Obregon's dying before I return. If he should drop off suddenly, I advise you all to throw up your hats for Don Eusebio and quietly to fall in behind him until we

are ready to drive him from power. We know that the Krupp batteries cannot arrive for four months, and in that time we can be ready to take care of them. I shall not be here next Saturday; but four men can play poker after a fashion, and you can keep up the game and the conferences."

AFTER the men left Ladbrook's house for the bank, Margaret seemed distrait and nervous, and when Violet heard her tell the two serving-women that they could spend the afternoon with their families, Violet determined not to leave her friend during the afternoon.

"That heart attack last night," she said, "has left me weak. I must ask you to let me stay here till I feel better."

Margaret started, but, quickly controlling herself, said:

"Certainly, my dear. Take one of these long-chairs, and I will have Pedro start the punkah again. Perhaps a little breeze will refresh you."

"Yes, a little air would do me good," said Violet. "But I feel so let down that the singing of the birds gets upon my nerves. Let me go into the sitting-room and lie down on the sofa."

Margaret looked relieved and said brightly:

"Yes, that will be best; but better still would be for you to go up-stairs to my bedroom."

"No," said Violet; "climbing the stairs will do my heart no good. I'll use the sofa in the sitting-room, if you don't mind."

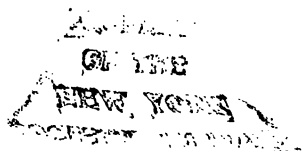
Margaret acquiesced, and as Violet stretched herself

upon the sofa, she busied herself drawing the curtains of the windows giving on the veranda, saying that this would help keep out the noise of the birds. Then she added:

"Now, I'll leave you for a time while I look over my things and see what I shall need for the journey." As she disappeared, she closed the door behind her.

Could it be possible, Violet thought, that there was something really serious between her friend and Don Eusebio? It seemed incredible, but Margaret was admittedly bored by her life in Aldaban, and her nature craved excitement. If she were to permit herself to look with favor upon any of the natives, Don Eusebio would naturally be her choice. The fact that he was avowedly hostile to her husband's interests would weigh but little in the balance. If Eusebio and Margaret had been meeting, it would naturally be on Saturdays, when all Aldaban knew that her husband spent the afternoon at the poker-table in the rear of his bank. Don Eusebio could visit her at her house with perfect safety, for the servants were natives, and no torture could wring from their lips a word about the doings of a man so powerful as Don Eusebio. Ladbroke's house was removed from the busier portion of the town, and there was little life in the street, except during the early morning hours, when the servants of the neighborhood were walking lazily to and from the market-place.

At that moment the soft-toned bell struck its three low, clear notes. A door opened, and Violet caught a glimpse of Margaret's anxious face before it closed silently again. Violet got to her feet and, running to a



window giving on the patio, cautiously drew aside a corner of the curtain, and saw Margaret hurry past on the veranda, holding one hand to her lips and waving the other in a prohibitory manner, as if enjoining some one in the patio to silence. Another glance revealed to Violet a striking figure standing near the fountain. It was Don Eusebio.

He was clad in the native fashion, and his costume was light brown in color. His short, open jacket bore two rows of gold buttons down the front, and showed a cream-colored silk shirt, with soft rolling collar held together by a flowing, bright-red necktie. A sash of the same hue girdled his waist. Tight trousers, the side seams of which glittered with more gold buttons, ended in high-heeled, red morocco leather boots bearing heavy gold spurs. Above this mass of mixed color rose his strongly-poised bullet head, the black hair brushed back in waves. A long mustache of the same color fell almost to his chin, hiding completely his full red lips and flashing white teeth. Over his heart was placed his sombrero, covered with gold lace, and his body was inclined in a slight bow. He was what the natives of Spanish America call *muy charo*, or very dandified, but his costume was strictly national.

Margaret literally ran to meet him, and he, seizing her hand, covered it with kisses. She put her hand to her heart, and, speaking hurriedly in a low tone, pointed to the house. Eusebio frowned. Then, taking her arm, he led her hesitating steps across the patio.

They seated themselves on the lowest step of the

staircase leading to the veranda, and though their backs were turned to Violet, she could catch what they said:

"Why is that woman here? You know our Saturdays are sacred," he complained.

Margaret told him why, and also of her projected visit to New York.

"Light of my eyes, you condemn me to a month of utter darkness," he mourned. "No sun, no moon, no stars will shine for me while you are gone. But I shall not be idle while you are away. My arm shall be nerved by thought of you. Obregon's days are numbered, and I shall succeed him as president. Your husband and the other damned Americans will be driven from the country, but you shall stay and be my queen, and after a few years of prosperous rule, we shall leave this country forever and go to Paris, there to live a life of luxury and pleasure. Neither you nor I were born to spend our lives anywhere but in the capital of the world."

When he finished, Margaret threw her arms around his neck and buried her face on his shoulder.

Violet, overcome by what she had seen and heard, returned to the sofa and, throwing herself upon it, closed her eyes. What seemed ages passed, when the door opened, and Margaret entered softly and put her hand on Violet's head. The latter started, as if awakened from a sound sleep, sat up, and said:

"What time is it? I have been asleep."

"It is nearly five o'clock," replied Margaret. "Do you feel better?"

"Much," said Violet. "The rest has done me good. I can go home now."

CHAPTER VI

THE Hardings and Margaret sailed on Thursday, and Violet waited until they were well at sea before telling her husband what she had learned of Margaret's relations with Don Eusebio, though she minimized the gravity of the situation as much as possible.

They reached New York in the early morning, and were met at quarantine by Everett. During the journey up the bay he explained to Harding the satisfactory condition of affairs, and as soon as the ladies were established in their hotel, he and Harding hurried down town to meet Wallace.

The introduction was soon over, and Everett said at once:

"Harding knows all that has been done at this end, John, and he can lay before you the exact situation in Mescalita."

For half an hour Harding talked without interruption, giving a wonderfully clear picture of the situation. He told of the bad organization of the army, and the certainty that a large part of it could be bribed at the last moment, and he showed the necessity of the immediate arming of the Hualtecos and the quick arrival of at least five hundred Americans. He asked Wallace

when and how those men could reach the Hualtecos.

Wallace answered:

"The matter is well in hand. I have started organizing a colonization company, the papers of which are already filed with the Secretary of State for New York. The charter of this company is a wide one, but its principal object is to colonize and develop certain vast tracts of land situated in the State of Lipaza, the southernmost State of the Republic of Pulqueria, which touches at that point the frontier of Mescalita. Across the border live the Hualtecos. The five hundred men will be recruited in the West, transported to San Disco, and there shipped with their arms and supplies to a seaport on the west coast of Pulqueria, where they will be supplied with horses and pack-animals and will march overland to the State of Lipaza. The men will be a tough lot and used to bearing arms. They will be given able leaders who can lick them into rough shape in a week or two after their arrival at Lipaza. At latest, if all goes well, they should be able to march into the Hualtecos country in somewhat less than three months. With them will go the arms and munitions for the Hualtecos, together with their own supplies and a small, but well-equipped, medical staff. To-morrow I shall have the first proofs of the latest maps of Lipaza and Mescalita, and by working night and day we shall have many copies of these maps ready against your departure. There will be less chance of error if we all have the same map."

Harding broke in:

"It will be a pleasure to make a revolution on really

scientific lines, or at least with maps and time-tables. We ought to win if only because the idea is a new one. In all the revolutions that Everett and I have taken part in, system of any sort was entirely absent."

Wallace nodded and said:

"My associates are going into this matter in a businesslike way, for to them it is virtually a business enterprise. We are able to use Pulqueria as a base because of our friendly relations with the rulers. It has been made worth their while to close their eyes to our movements, and you will find that, once in their territory, every assistance will be given to you and the men. The only request that they have made is that our men behave as well as possible while in their territory."

Everett broke in:

"There must be no delay at the sea-port; that is where our men will give us trouble, if anywhere. I hope you will have the horses, pack-animals, and pack-saddles ready against the arrival of the steamer. As long as we keep the men busy, we'll have little difficulty in handling them."

Wallace nodded and, referring to a note-book, said:

"Twelve hundred horses, five thousand pack-animals, together with their necessary equipment, will be in the neighborhood of Talco, on the west coast of Pulqueria, four weeks from to-day. We have also contracted for a large herd of beef cattle for the commissariat. The men will live and fight well on beef, biscuits, and coffee.

"Lipaza is not too far from Talco, and the roads are not bad. The expedition should cover the distance in ten or twelve days. We have also engaged two hundred

native packers and horse-wranglers in Pulqueria. This will be ample, because, as most of the five hundred Americans will be cow-boys, they will be accustomed not only to handling animals, but to packing them as well. Whether Obregon lives or dies, it makes little difference to us. The blow is going to be struck anyway, whether it hits Obregon or Eusebio separately or together. Even if worst comes to worst, and the Krupp batteries arrive before we are ready, we must be prepared to meet that situation. In some way they must be stopped at Cruz Chico, even if by doing so makes complications with the German Government."

"I think we can take care of the German artillery all right," said Harding.

"Now," said Wallace, "let's go and have a bite of lunch."

Shortly after four, Everett and Wallace met in Mike's club-room. After a drink and a chat with the old man, they joined Acklom, who was sitting in the shade of the horse-chestnut tree, playing with the boar-hounds. Wallace told him of their meeting with Harding.

"I am sorry that we can't have Harding here," he said. "I'd like you to meet him. It is a pity that he has to go directly to Mescalita."

"No," said Acklom, "I am glad he is going back. His visit to New York and the story that he can tell Estrada and the other Mescalians will strengthen his position and ours with these people." Then, turning to Everett, he asked, "Are the six men that you have at Cruz Chico enough to handle that end of it?"

"Yes," said Everett. "Ellison, the bookkeeper, and

his men are all aces and can be counted on. Now, Mr. Acklom, there is one little fly in the ointment. Last night Harding told me that he fears there is a certain intimacy between Mrs. Ladbroke and Don Eusebio, the brother-in-law of President Obregon, and the man we will have to fight to achieve our ends. Ladbroke, of course, knows nothing of this, and if he did, Harding is sure—and in this I agree with him—that Ladbroke would lose his temper and do some stupid thing. It was with the greatest difficulty that Mr. and Mrs. Harding persuaded Margaret Ladbroke to come with them. Of course neither she nor Mrs. Harding know anything about the revolution. The latter loves her husband, and will do whatever he wishes without asking him for too many reasons; but Mrs. Ladbroke is self-willed and will be hard to handle.”

Acklom laughed:

“What do you want me to do with this fair creature who seems to trouble our plans? Shall we shut her up for a while in a private asylum, or what? I know very little about women, and shall have to fall back upon my friend Wallace for advice. There must be some way out of it.”

Wallace laughed and said:

“I think we can arrange that.”

“Fix it to suit yourself,” said Acklom, “so long as you see to it that our plans are not interfered with. Now, how about those bonds? Are the foreign holders showing any disposition to sell?”

“Yes,” said Wallace; “most decidedly. Yesterday and to-day we bought two thousand at nineteen.”

"Stop buying, then," said Acklom. "They are on the down grade, having fallen from twenty-one. We have now established a market for them here in New York, and when matters are ripe, I shall get them for ten or better. When does Harding's ship sail?"

"On Saturday," replied Wallace.

"That will give us plenty of time to have the maps printed, so that Harding can take them back with him; and with him also goes a tentative time-table of the revolutionary movement." Then turning to Everett, he added, "With that money I advanced you on the interim certificates and with the money that Estrada has furnished, shall you have enough for the Mescalita end?"

"Plenty," said Everett, "so long as you look after paying and arming the Americans."

"That goes without saying," replied Acklom. "I have sent word to some friends of mine in Indian Territory, New Mexico, and Arizona to pass the word in those localities, and I expect that they have already started rounding up a bunch of useful citizens. My plan is for Everett to go in a few days, first to Indian Territory, and then to New Mexico and Arizona. My man Bollard traveled with me in those places eight years ago, and we made many useful friends particularly among the rougher element. You know, Bollard has been both a miner and a cow-boy. I know the harvest is on now, but all of these Territories run more to cattle than to corn. They are far from being settled yet, and, barring a little truck farming near the towns,

the hardest work the men do there is riding range. The word is being passed by the right people that a colonization company is being formed for cattle-raising and mining on a large scale in the State of Lipaza, in Pulqueria. Fifty dollars a month is being offered to the rank and file, and a hundred dollars to the foremen, and a liberal bonus at the end of the first year if the men do well, with traveling expenses guaranteed both ways.

"We shall have no trouble in getting the men, though five hundred good cow-boys is a large order, and the ranch-owners will roar when the men leave their jobs. We must move quickly and, in a way, stampede the men; for, if we take time over the matter, opposition will develop, and the newspapers take the matter up. We are not hungry for publicity. I am arranging with friends of mine in San Disco to have a four-thousand-ton tramp steamer. The military supplies and other impedimenta will be ready against the arrival of the men, and the lot will be shipped together, I hope, in a month or at the latest in six weeks.

Then, pulling out a note-book and turning to Wallace, he gave him this order, to be split between Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City.

600 range saddles with equipment; 4,000 pack-saddles; 1,000 blankets; 600 slickers; 1 million matches; 1,000 pounds of Bull Durham smoking tobacco; cigarette paper; chewing tobacco; 600 second-hand army-mess kits; 50 long-handled shovels; 50 picks; 100 miles telephone wire; 10 field telephones; indelible pencils; note-books; 500 sugar-cane machetes (get these in Bridgeport) with scabbards. All were to be sent by express to Bulwar & Co., San Disco.

"That's a fine list," said Everett. "I see you understand outfitting an expedition, Mr. Acklom."

"More or less," replied the latter; "I've been doing it for over twenty years. But this isn't a perfectly full list, Everett. There are several things which you must buy yourself in San Disco: dynamite, fuse, and detonators, for instance. 'I'll tell you where to get them. I am sure to forget many little things. I have already. And add soap, tooth-brushes, and insect powder to the list. Now I am going to bring Bollard into conference."

So saying, he pressed an electric button three times, and in a few minutes Bollard appeared.

"Take a seat, Hank," said Acklom. And Bollard, without ado, sat down.

Everett was much struck by Bollard's appearance. Despite his fifty years and his gray hair, he was well set up and quick and energetic in his movements. His clean-shaven face, with its slightly receding forehead, straight nose, and prominent chin, was Anglo-Saxon in type, though his blue eyes, with their black lashes, bespoke more than a drop of Irish blood.

"I've been telling Everett," said Acklom, "that you are going with him to round up the Westerners, and that you will accompany him at least as far as San Disco. Perhaps it will be necessary for you to go the whole journey and see the game through, though I hope not, as I shall need you here. What do you say, Hank?"

"Well, sir, I think we had better wait until we see how things looks in San Disco before we decide. Though,

if we get the foremen we hope to, things ought to go smoothly enough without me."

Acklom nodded and said:

"You know we haven't had time to get answers to the letters we sent, but they ought to be coming in to-morrow or next day. Now, let's see." He took out his note-book: "You have written to Langton, at Wigmore, I. T.; Barker, who keeps the Zimmer House at Copper City; to Read, who keeps the store at Apache Tejo,—these places in New Mexico,—and to Walsh, who keeps the White House saloon in Clifton, Arizona. Are there any more that you think we ought to write to?"

Bollard shook his head.

"These men are enough, and they'll start the show without waiting for me; but they'll work twice as fast once I have spoken to them personally. In my letters I made it strong that Jack Adams was behind me in the matter. You left a fine name out there, Boss, by helping the right sort of people in one way or another. And the mention of Jack Adams will make the boys sit up and take notice."

"Well," said Acklom, "we'll wait till next Saturday for the answers. They'll surely come by then. So on Sunday you and Everett will start for Wigmore. Once there, you'll go straight to Langton, and he'll give you a shake-down in a room above his saloon, so that you can keep under cover. For the mob we shall get in Indian Territory—I count on two hundred from there—are a suspicious lot, and we shall have to start in under the right auspices to get their confidence."

Then, turning to Everett with a smile, he said:

"You know, in getting men of this sort, high moral character is at a discount. I expect that the Indian Territory crowd will be mostly outlaws, hidden there from many different States and Territories and not necessarily natives; but they will be a husky lot, glad to get regular pay for once, and will behave well enough if kept busy."

"I understand," said Everett. "This is no Sunday-school picnic; but I don't expect much trouble, for good food, plenty of tobacco, and enough occupation to keep them busy will work wonders with the toughest, not to mention the good pay and the bonus which they are to get after a year."

"I agree with you," said Acklom. "But, beside that, I depend upon Hank Bollard to find for you such foremen and leaders that your orders will be carried out without friction."

Then, turning to Wallace, he said:

"Now I want you to have hand-bills printed, say three thousand each, in three different colors, red, yellow, and green. You will see that they are written in Spanish. Give them to O'Grady, the job-printer. He will not know what they mean, and will print them without question.

"On the red pamphlet, which will be distributed first, on the eve of the revolutionary movement, put the words 'Liberty, Prosperity, Fraternity. Down with the gringos! Long live Estrada, the Mescalian patriot!'

"On the yellow leaflets print the words: 'Liberty, Prosperity, Equality. Down with the Germans! Long live Mescalía! Our choice is Estrada.'

"On the green print: 'Liberty, Fraternity, Prosperity. Down with Don Eusebio, the friend of the Germans! Long live Estrada, that true patriot!'

"As I said, the red leaflets are to be distributed on the eve of the movement. Shortly after will appear the yellow leaflets, and last will appear the green. If I know anything about the Spanish-American character, those three leaflets will about do the trick. No movement can succeed without the aid of those magic words, liberty, fraternity, equality, prosperity. And no movement can fail which attacks the gringos, and it will be an easy step to translate gringo into German. I am afraid Schwartz and his friends will have a hard time before we get through with them.

"Have these leaflets printed at once, and let Harding take them with him to Aldaban. We shall, of course, cut the cable at Cruz Chico the day before we begin operations, and by means of our telephone only news favorable to us will get out of the country. Lipaza is linked up by wire with Pulque City, the capital of Pulqueria, and thence with the outside world.

"Now, Everett, I want you to have a clever man stationed in Lipaza who can take the telephone messages, put them in good shape, and telegraph them on to Pulque City."

They sat chatting over their drinks till late in the afternoon, and Acklom fascinated Everett with tales of his travels in Africa, Arabia, and China, where he had traveled with Bollard, Hussein, Nurzouk, and Fong Yung.

Having made a rendezvous for the next day at four o'clock, Wallace and Everett left.

CHAPTER VII

ONCE comfortably settled at their hotel, the ladies gave up their time to shopping. This they did with such zest, despite the heat, that, when night came, they were utterly worn out and glad to seek their beds. It was the first time that either of the women had had really large sums at their disposal, and they indulged in a regular debauch of buying. They always shopped together and, in most cases, took counsel one with the other as to what they should buy. But occasionally they would examine goods in different counters of the same shop; though even when separated from her friend, Violet kept an eye upon her and once noticed, when visiting Tiffany's, that Margaret Ladbrook bought a gold cigarette case, which, after a hurried glance in her direction, she put in her hand-bag. Now, Ladbrook did not smoke cigarettes. The vision of Don Eusebio rose before Violet's eyes. She told her husband, who was greatly annoyed.

"Now, Violet," he said, "you must keep up the farce of your heart trouble, and seek opportunities for a short rest wherever you may be. Don't let yourself forget for a moment that you are playing an important part. Margaret Ladbrook must not go back to Mescalita, and to that end we have arranged that she will miss

the boat that I am about to take; but, after my departure, we depend entirely upon you to keep her here. The time has come for me to tell you the exact situation.

"A revolution is about to break out in Mescalita, led by Estrada. Ladbroke and I have thrown our fortunes in with his, and shortly after my return the movement will begin. It is directed primarily against the ambitions of Don Eusebio. He is our bitter enemy, and his success would mean our ruin. We mean to succeed, and Eusebio will either become a fugitive or be slain. You see, my dear, how vitally important it is that Margaret Ladbroke should know nothing of this. Besides causing us trouble, she might even betray us. I am afraid she has more than a fancy for Eusebio. The fact that she used a lot of her husband's money to buy him a present goes to prove this."

Violet did not start or change color while Harding was speaking, and when he finished, she said quietly:

"Wesley, I have long known that something was in the wind. I knew that you had met with unexpected and serious opposition in your railroad contract, and I know you well enough to be sure that you would not take a defeat without first giving battle. Now that I know that when we part in a few days you are going into danger, I want you to know that I have perfect confidence that you will come out of it safely and victoriously. You may count upon me to keep Margaret by my side until the revolution breaks out and it is made impossible for her to return to Mescalita; but you must help me to do this. It will not be enough to make Margaret miss the boat. I must become really ill, and

you can arrange for some prominent doctor to order me to go to the country for rest. She cannot refuse to go with me, particularly as it will be supposed at first that only a short treatment will be necessary. You may count upon me. It is the least I can do to help you."

Harding took her in his arms and kissed her. Then, holding her away from him and looking straight into her blue eyes, he said with emotion:

"You are a dear girl, and as brave as they make 'em. I know I can count on you to play the game. The way you take it makes it easier for me, and I am grateful. You know this fight we are making is not for fun. All our interests are in Mescalita, and we had to make this fight. There was no other way. Schwartz and the Germans have tied themselves to Eusebio and his fortunes. Consequently, we have thrown in our lot with Estrada. He is our best friend in Mescalita, and with him victorious, we shall not only finish our contracts successfully, but our firm will run the business of the country, and you can bet we'll wake up the sleepy Mescalitans and do enormous business and make a vast fortune. Is not that a stake worth playing for? We've got the financial backing, and we've got the men and the brains, and we can't lose. I can't give you the details."

Violet could not help smiling as she said:

"We are playing the old tragedy, 'The Rival Queens,' Margaret and I. On the face of it she looks to have a better chance of winning than I, for she will win if Don Eusebio remains true to her."

Harding smiled grimly.

"He'll have no chance to be true to any one. He's got his death-warrant in any case. I don't believe Ladbroke suspects anything; but if he did, good-by Don Eusebio!"

At dinner that night Violet had a perfectly good fainting fit. After she was taken upstairs a physician was summoned. He was not only a doctor, but a man of the world as well. Harding told him in a few words what was wanted, and he fell in pleasantly with their plans, gave a long Latin name to Violet's alleged heart trouble, and in a very serious and convincing manner ordered her to go to the Adirondacks for at least ten days' complete rest, where she could be under the eyes of a well-known physician, a friend of his, with whom he would communicate.

Margaret was in the room when the doctor gave his orders. She appeared greatly upset at the thought of missing the steamer; but the doctor, turning to her, insisted that it would be unwise for Mrs. Harding to travel alone and said that it would take, he hoped, only a short time to effect a cure, and that perhaps she could take the next steamer. So it was arranged, and the next day the ladies left for the Adirondacks.

CHAPTER VIII

AT four o'clock in the afternoon Everett and Wallace met Acklom under the horse-chestnut tree. When they had taken their places, Acklom, turning to Everett, said:

"One of the greatest factors that makes for success in an enterprise like ours is having a fixed schedule for action not only of weeks and days, but also of hours and perhaps minutes. To that end I propose to buy a thousand watches of the same make. Five hundred of these go with Harding for use in Mescalita, and five hundred go with you. These watches, being of the same make, will keep approximately the same time. We then shall have a marked advantage over our enemies, whose watches and clocks undoubtedly differ widely. But this possible difference is not enough. I want you to tell Harding that on the eve of the operations he must arrange that all public clocks in the principal cities be tampered with, so that each will differ as much as possible one from the other."

"A capital idea," said Everett.

Acklom announced that Bollard had received answers from all his correspondents in the West, and it was decided that Everett and Bollard should leave for Wigmore on Sunday night. The shipment of arms and

ammunition to San Disco had already begun, and all matters seemed well in hand, so that the men parted in high good humor.

On Saturday Harding sailed for Cruz Chico, and at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon Everett and Bollard took the Vandalia express for St. Louis, where they would get a train for Wigmore. By agreement they were dressed in cheap, but good, ready-made clothing and wore Stetson hats, which gave them the necessary Western air. With their rugged countenances, they looked for all the world like railroad contractors or prosperous cattle-men.

The journey was uneventful. They spent some time in St. Louis, and on the fifth day from New York reached Wigmore a little after noon.

Wigmore had arrived at that stage common to the growth of all Western cities, happily in most cases only a passing phase. There had been a boom, but it had somehow passed on its mysterious way, leaving behind it more inhabitants than the town could comfortably support. Idleness was the result, and the railway station was the chosen spot of the idlers, particularly at train-time. When Everett and Bollard got down from the smoking-car in which they had traveled, and took between them their old gripsack, their only luggage, they found it difficult to make their way along the crowded station platform.

Everett and Bollard passed as quietly as possible through the crowd, exchanging glances with no one, and by their dress and manner seemed part of it. Leaving the station behind them, they made for the outskirts

of the town, and soon reached a large building. The street on which it was situated had originally been the principal thoroughfare; but the coming of the railroad had changed the geography of Wigmore, and Langton's hotel was now quite removed from the center of what activity there was in the straggling town.

It quite filled the space between two narrow streets. A veranda ran across the entire front, and, facing this, ran a long hitching-rail to which were tied a dozen drowsy cow-ponies, saddled and bridled. On the veranda, clad in a collarless cotton shirt, blue-jeans overalls and much-worn carpet slippers, sat a bald-headed, heavily bearded man of well past middle age.

As the two travelers crossed the dusty road and entered an opening in the hitching-rail, the man waved a wordless greeting to them with his right hand.

"That's old Tom Langton," said Bollard to Everett. "One of the last survivors of Quantrell's gang; was a great friend of Jesse James." Letting go his hold on the gripsack, Bollard stepped up on the veranda and shook hands with the old man, who rose with some difficulty to meet him.

"I got your word, Hank," was his greeting. "I see the train ain't late. I fixed up a room at the back, upstairs, where you and your friend will be quiet. Come on up."

So saying, he hobbled through the door, and, mounting painfully a rickety staircase, led them to an ill-furnished room, whose one window presented a view of an ill-kept corral. Beyond stood a large group of

tall sycamore trees, whose heavy leafage stabbed with green the yellow-blue line of the horizon.

There was only one chair in the room, which Langton took, the other men seating themselves on one of the beds.

"This is my friend, Bill Everett, Tom," said Bollard. "A good man and a friend of Jack Adams."

"How's Jack?" said Langton.

"First rate, except for some trouble with his eyes, which keeps him out east. That's why he's not here. Everett is his representative. I am just along to help him round up the boys and see they get started right. What luck have you had getting them together?"

"So so. I put them notices you sent me about the colony scheme down Pulque way in the papers here, in Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and McAlester; and I sent word to Al Benton up north and Ruby Foster out Panhandle way, and they're both movin'. Ruby's eatin' his lunch down-stairs now with ol' Pegleg, who brings word from Benton. Things are right quiet out here these days, and the boys take a right smart interest in your game, specially seein' as Jack Adams is behind it."

"That's good," said Bollard. "Ruby and Al are all right and have heaps of friends of the right sort. There's only one thing. We don't want any cattle-rustlers in this line-up; for we're counting on getting a good lot of real cow-boys further west, and rustlers and cow-boys don't mix."

Langton raised his hand.

"We'll do the best we kin; but as I figure it, a good

feller is a good feller, no matter what he's done. You know how it is, Hank. The lot will average good, but there's got to be some houn's among them. Al and Ruby will sure chuck in boys that owe 'em money, so as to get the advance money you'll pay 'em."

Hank shook his head.

"The reason there isn't going to be much advance money. Everything's found in this game. All I figure on giving is ten dollars a head to the rank and file for spending money."

"Well," said Langton, "ten dollars is ten dollars, isn't it? It looks big money out here these days. Times is hard. This country's gettin' too blame civilized. What with U. S. marshals, Pinkertons, and express-company detectives, it's hard to pull off a trick. None of our boys has done nothing in six months."

"All the better," said Bollard. "It ought to be easy to get a good mob. Of course you told Ruby and Al that they would get ten dollars a head for the men they furnish."

"Sure," said Langton.

"How's the editor of the paper here?" asked Bollard.

"All right," replied Langton; "real good sensible feller. Keeps his hair parted in the middle. Don't look for no trouble, like all them writin' gents out here."

Bollard smiled and, turning to Everett, said:

"You'd better go and see this newspaper man tomorrow; give him a ten-dollar bill and a good *spiel* about the colonization scheme. Then you can slip up to Guthrie, Oklahoma City, and McAlester, and do the same thing in those places. So we'll have the local press

with us and, under cover of this propaganda, we'll quietly get our men from Langton, Foster, and Benton. Even if the authorities wake up and see the class of boys we are getting, they'll be for the most part glad to see them leave the country, though you may have to stake a sheriff or two to keep his eyes shut."

"Now, boys," said Langton, "if you want any dinner, you must hustle. Our meals here are reg'lar, even if they ain't swell. We count on cleaning up the dining-room a little after one o'clock. I'll go ahead and tip off Ruby and Pegleg that you're here. 'Tain't policy to let on that you know 'em, Hank. You all can have a chat up here in the afternoon."

Thus saying, the old man left. When the last echo of his footsteps had died away, Everett and Bollard descended the stairs, stopped for a moment or two on the veranda, and then, turning to the left, entered the dining-room and took seats at a small oilcloth-covered table near the door. Their entrance appeared to be unnoticed. The men in the room did no talking. They were either busy with their food or gazed thoughtfully at the plate in front of them or at some point in the ceiling. It seemed to be taboo even to look at one's neighbor, much less to speak to him. At a long table in the middle of the room were twelve men, one and all in their colored cotton shirt-sleeves. On a long line of pegs driven in the wall hung their hats, coats, and here and there a belt full of cartridges supporting a revolver in its holster. Some of the men wore their side-arms. The meal was served by two neatly dressed, well-formed, good-looking young women, who moved

briskly about. They were treated with great respect by the men, and invariably, spoken to in low tones, and always addressed as "Miss." Even with the wholesome quality of the food, one needed a good appetite to enjoy it. The heat was terrific. Kitchen odors, so heavy that they seemed almost solid, filled the air. The ironware table service, knives, forks, and spoons were not only coarse, but palpably dirty. The rattle of plates, knives, and forks was tempered by the noisy hum of myriads of flies, who disputed with the diners the food on their plates.

Bollard's quick eye had determined the whereabouts of Foster and Pegleg, but he gave them no glance, nor did they look at him. They were seated at a small table across the room, and with them sat Langton, not eating, but occasionally putting in a word, to which his hearers appeared to pay not the slightest attention.

Everett and Bollard were so late that they had hardly given their orders when chairs were pushed back, and one by one the other diners went to the rack, got their things, and tramped noisily to the door, one and all leaving thirty cents beside their plate in payment for their meal.

When the last had gone, Langton came to their table and said:

"Ruby and Pegleg have got a room across the hall from you, boys. I told 'em you'd drop in and have a chat about four o'clock. How's that?"

"All right," said Bollard.

When they had finished their meal, the men joined Langton on the veranda. He showed them with some

pride a copy of *The Sentinel*, the weekly newspaper, a two-leafed sheet which had on the front page an eloquent description of the colonization scheme. Toward the end an appeal was made for young, intelligent, and enterprising men. Fame and fortune were held out as a bait, and the youth of Indian Territory were urged to join the movement, make large fortunes, and return to spend them with the home folks.

"How's that for high? Cost me ten dollars. Jeb Luce is a great writer, ain't he? When you get rested up, Everett, you better go and see him. Tell him you're pleased, and slip him five or ten dollars." Then, with a shrewd look: "Say you come from me. I like to keep on the feller's good side. Times is changing, and I want to keep popular."

Everett stretched his arms over his head, yawned, and said:

"Where's *The Sentinel's* office?"

"You can't miss it. You passed it on your way here. It's down near the station."

"All right," said Everett as he got up and left them.

Bollard leaned forward, put his hands on Langton's knee, and said:

"I saw Curry and Cassidy back in New York a short time ago. They seemed to have plenty of money, and I think they are planning to get out of the country and go to South America to settle down."

"You bet they've got plenty of money," said Langton. "In the last two years that bunch has picked up over four hundred thousand dollars. I guess you read about their last trick—down near Texarkana held up

an express and got eighty thousand dollars in currency. Made an easy get-away, too,—wore rubber boots till they got to where their horses was. Then took 'em off. The blood-hounds trailed the rubber boots all right, but when them came to 'em would not go a foot further. There's only six in the bunch, and they're all well fixed by now. From what Pegleg says some of them are up with Al Benton in the Hole in the Ground. They're good fellers and have got plenty of friends. You could do worse, Hank, than to take 'em along. I know they want to quit this train-robbing business and git married and settle down. They'd do fine in your colony."

"Well," said Bollard, "you know I am not running the show. It's Everett who is the boss, and Jack Adams is the backer. All I have got to do is to help them get the men. Everett's a fine man, knows his business, and can handle the boys all right, I'm sure; but it will make it easier for him if we pick up some leaders or foremen who can put the fear of God into the boys. I depend on you and Benton to pick out these men. I don't trust Ruby Foster an inch, though I'll take what boys he brings. I've got to, for we're in a hurry. You'll have to handle Foster, Tom. While Everett is traveling round fixing up the newspapers, I'll go with Pegleg and see Benton."

"That will be a good plan," said Langton.

The men dropped into silence; Langton went to sleep, and Bollard, lighting a cigar, looked lazily about him.

In a short time Everett returned. The newspaper editor had proved most courteous, and promised to do everything to forward the colonization scheme. He took

the ten dollars offered as a matter of course, and seemed satisfied with the sum, and had given Everett letters to the editors for which he had asked.

At length, overcome by the heat, they decided to go up-stairs and lie down till four o'clock.

They were awakened by a low, steady rapping on the door.

Bollard opened the door and greeted the two men with:

"Hello, Pegleg! Hello, Ruby!"

It was evident that they had been drinking, for they swayed on their feet and seated themselves heavily on the bed as Everett was introduced to them.

Foster was the taller of the two, being well over six feet. His gray hair fell to his shoulders, and a drooping gray mustache covered his mouth. Over his left eye was a birth-mark, bright red in color, the size of a dime. It was evident that his name Ruby was derived from this.

Pegleg had lost his right leg below the knee, and was a contrast to his friend. His head was close-cropped, and disclosed a white scar running from crown almost to one eye-brow. Both cheeks bore bullet-scars, and a marked indistinctness in enunciation hinted that in its transit the bullet had knocked out several teeth. It was evident that he bore his sixty years lightly. Both he and Foster as well as Langton had been followers of Quantrell, and, with Al Benton, formed about the last of that famous band of guerillas.

Foster lived in the Panhandle, where he ran a saloon and gambling-house. He had formerly been sheriff for

several terms, but his evident leaning toward the lawless had come in conflict with increasing civilization. For years he had been a cattle thief on a large scale and was supposed to have amassed a considerable fortune.

Foster spoke first.

"Well, Hank, glad to see you. How's Jack Adams?" Without waiting for a reply, he continued: "Good feller, Jack. 'F he was here, he'd treat his old friend Ruby right. This yer ten dollars a head for gettin' prime men ain't much. You an' Jack ought to stake me to five hundred dollars beside the ten dollars a head."

"Now, Ruby," said Bollard, "don't be a hog. You're being treated right, and you know it; but for old friendship sake I'll stand a raise if you do as I say. The boys won't get their ten dollars advance until they get on the train. That's flat; so you don't get any of that. I want seventy-five good young fellows and as few reg'lar bad ones as possible. I want men that can ride, pack, and shoot. With the seventy-five men I want five foremen, they to be picked out by Tom Langton and not by you. These men are to be shipped on three successive days, to be named later. Once on the train, they will be given their tickets to where we are going and ten dollars a piece. You get ten dollars a head for each man, and if all goes well, Tom Langton will give you three hundred dollars when the job is done. That's the best I can do."

"Well, I'll do it," said Foster; "but I want a hundred right now 'fore I start."

"All right, Ruby," said Bollard; "we're pals, and I trust you."

Turning to Pegleg, with a smile, he said: "You get yours later on. Now, Ruby, I want you to start for the Panhandle at once and get to work."

"Not till to-morrow," said Ruby, firmly. "Back home I don't drink, but 'tend to business. Now I'm here, I'm going to get good and drunk. With a sweeping gesture that included Everett and Bollard, he added: "You, gents, jine us, too. Won't you?"

"No, thanks," said Everett. "We ain't using any liquor just now. When this game is settled, Ruby, I'll come back."

"All right," said Ruby, good-naturedly, and he and Pegleg left the room and tramped noisily down-stairs.

Everett smiled and said:

"Do you think Foster will start to-morrow?"

"Sure thing," said Bollard. "He'll be blind drunk by ten o'clock to-night. Pegleg will put him to bed, and he'll sleep it off and catch the first train in the morning."

"How did Pegleg lose his leg?" asked Everett.

"In holding up a train in Idaho," said Bollard, "about twelve years ago. One of the boys was killed, and Pegleg got two slugs in his ankle. He's a tough old bird, for, notwithstanding that, he rode all the way, almost without rest, back to the Hole in the Ground, where Al Benton lives."

"What exactly is the Hole in the Ground, and what does Al Benton do?" asked Everett.

"The Hole in the Ground is a long, sunken, narrow valley. You can't see it till you get right on top of it. It's full of springs of fine water and has grand grass.

Al Benton has lived there for more than thirty years. He and Tom Langton worked with the James boys until that gang was put out of business. Since then they have always worked together. Benton uses the Hole in the Ground to breed fast horses for train-robbers and other hold-up men. For the use of them, Benton and his gang demand a share in the proceeds of all the robberies.

"Langton is the head of the information department of the gang. He has agents everywhere, and gets news of shipments of currency and when large sums are deposited in poorly-protected banks in out-of-the-way places. Benton never leaves the Hole in the Ground, and Langton never leaves Wigmore. Pegleg carries the word between them. Although the majority of the inhabitants of the Territory are perfectly law-abiding themselves, they do not seem to be shocked by the presence of Benton and Langton and their followers. Most of the old settlers come from the Southern States and were Confederate soldiers, and have a real sentiment for the remnants of Quantrell's famous band. Benton's gang never robs a nickle in the Territory and are very liberal. But times are changing, and when Benton and Langton die, the band will doubtless break up, and one of the great landmarks of the wild West will disappear forever."

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning Bollard was called at five o'clock by Langton, and, hurrying on his clothes, went down-stairs. He ate a hurried breakfast in company with the old man. He was told that Pegleg had already gone and Foster was in good-enough shape to take the first train west. Breakfast over, Langton took Bollard to the corral behind the hotel, where he found a fine roan horse saddled and bridled for his use. In the saddle-pockets had been placed a good supply of cold meat and bread, for traveling with Pegleg meant that, as far as possible, they would avoid not only hamlets, but even solitary habitations.

Langton explained to Bollard where he would fall in with Pegleg, and Bollard mounted and rode away.

When Bollard came up to him at their rendezvous, Pegleg was standing at his horse's head and wiping his lips with his coat-sleeve. When he saw Bollard, he pulled out of the capacious pocket of his coat a nearly filled whiskey bottle, which he waved.

"No use offerin' you any," he said; "but I shore do need some myself this mornin'. Keepin' up with Ruby is wet work, and I feel kinder shaky. Did you bring the chuck?"

Bollard nodded. "Plenty for two days," he said.

"That's good," said Pegleg. "Let's be going." So saying, he swung himself into the saddle with the agility of a boy.

Instead of a stirrup, on the right side of the saddle hung a little iron bucket about the size of a tea-cup, into which his pegleg fell naturally, once he was in the saddle.

Time and again they would leave the road, going at right angles to it for half a mile or so, and then turning off in the same general direction. These detours were caused by settlers' houses or small villages.

Shortly after noon, they came to a stream crossing the road. Turning off, they followed the water-course for nearly a mile, when they came to a small glade surrounded by a thick clump of trees. Here they unsaddled, and Pegleg turned the horses loose, after giving them a drink, taking care, however, to hobble Bollard's roan.

"We'll stop here till sundown for rest," said Pegleg. "It's nearly full moon, and we kin travel all night. This yer is the worst part of our road. A lot of new people has moved in here, and they ain't friendly to us boys."

The sun had set and the moon was rising when Bollard was awakened by Pegleg. They rode all night, and though the moon was bright, Pegleg did not hesitate to use the road, and they made good time. As the moon was setting, they found themselves on a vast plain which, in the dim light, appeared to be tenantless. But as the first rays of the sun burst over the horizon, Bol-

lard's quick eye caught sight of what seemed to be three tiny knolls on the flat surface of the plain. He knew them to be dugouts, the only safe style of house in this country of terrible blizzards and smiting winds.

Without speaking, Pegleg turned in their direction, and as they neared them, he said:

"Here we are at Jim Bell's place. We're on time. He's got corn for the horses, and will give us chuck. We'll rest here for four hours, and if we have luck, we'll strike the Hole in the Ground before dark."

Saying this, Pegleg kicked his horse into a canter, and in a few moments they reached a large field of badly-grown corn in the middle of which the dugouts were placed.

The larger of the three dugouts was the habitation. The other two, evidently, were barns; for against their sides, sheltered from the prevailing winds, were stacks of hay and corn. A small corral held a wagon and some farm implements. The roofs of the dugouts were not ten feet high at their ridge-pole, and their sides, covered with two feet of earth in which grasses, weeds, and even flowers had taken root, sloped to the ground. At each end of the habitation were rough chimneys built of sticks and clay, and from one of these curled a tiny spiral of smoke. There were no windows. In the doorway, showing only his head and shoulders, stood a young man, who greeted Pegleg with a wave of his hand.

"Howdy, Jim. Howdy," said Pegleg as he and his companion swung to the ground. "This is my friend, Hank Bollard. Hank, meet Jim Bell. We're goin' to Al's."

Without more ado Pegleg took the two horses to the corral.

"Come in," said Bell.

Bollard entered the door and descended the ladder leading to the floor, which was quite four feet below the level of the ground. The interior was rough in the extreme. A young woman was busy at the fire and did not turn around until Bell called to her and introduced Bollard with the words, "This is Mrs. Bell." She came forward then, wiping her hands on her apron. She and her husband were about the same age, less than thirty.

Their breakfast finished, Pegleg pointed to a clock on one of the cupboards and said:

"We've only got four hours, and are dead for sleep. Will you give us a shake-down, Mrs. Bell?"

"Sure," said the young woman, with a smile. "You know where the beds are. Did you feed your horses, Pegleg?"

"No. Just turned 'em in the corral," said the latter. "Too tired to work."

"You careless old cuss!" said Bell. "Anybody could come along and see 'em. The sheriff was nosin' round here only last week. I'll stick 'em in the barn, give 'em a drink and corn, and call you in four hours."

Bell woke them by beating a tin pan, and Bollard and Pegleg took their seats at the table without waiting to be asked, rubbing their eyes and yawning.

Mrs. Bell quickly placed food and coffee on the table before them, while her husband produced a piece of paper covered with names.

"Pegleg," he said, "you can tell Benton that, my wife

bein' agreeable, I have decided to go into this colony game. I and my brother Bob will go as foremen, and we can furnish thirty good fellers, mostly our kin. My wife's father will run the place while I'm gone. Lil'"—he pointed to his wife—"is glad for me to make a stake, so we can buy a decent farm. You know this place is Al Benton's. I tell her I'll be gone about a year. Is that right?" He turned to Bollard as he asked the question.

"That depends," said Bollard. "You may want to settle there with your family. It's a nice country."

"I'll gladly settle anywhere, to be away from these blizzards and the fear of Jim getting into trouble with the sheriff," Mrs. Bell declared.

The horses had recovered their freshness when they started out, and they pushed on at a good rate of speed, going due north. Occasionally they passed small groups of Indians, for they were in the neighborhood of the reservations, but rarely a man of their own color. Just before sundown Pegleg pulled up at a deserted dugout, and saying "Wait here a minute," left Bollard. He rode perhaps three hundred yards, gave a shrill whistle, and, waving his hat three times from right to left, waited, apparently, for an answer, though Bollard could see no one. Presently, Pegleg beckoned to him. He rode forward, and it was not until he was within a hundred yards of his companion that he became aware of a chasm lying in front of him, cutting the prairie like a gash.

"I got the all-right signal," said Pegleg. "Without

that, a man is taking a chance if he goes close to the edge of the Hole in the Ground."

The chasm ran east and west, and at its widest point appeared to be perhaps a third of a mile wide. The sides were steep and covered with rocks and underbrush, and were quite four hundred feet in depth. The eye rested with pleasure on the scene below, a refreshing contrast to the sunburnt plain on which they stood. Just beneath them were a group of log cabins surrounded by fruit-trees and a large kitchen garden, whose ripening produce made an almost golden spot in the vivid green that carpeted the whole surface. Right and left were fields of corn, wheat, and oats, and here and there were large fenced-in fields, holding a few cattle and sheep and many horses.

"Here's where we get off," said Pegleg. "We have to go down afoot. No, don't follow me. We allus go sep'rate, so's not to make a reg'lar trail. Turn your horse loose. He'll find his way down."

So saying, he removed the saddle-bags and gave his horse a slap. The latter, without hesitation, approached the edge of the chasm and lowered himself gingerly over the edge, followed by the roan. It was with real difficulty that the men made their way between boulders and underbrush down the almost perpendicular side of the chasm and Bollard marveled at the skill with which Pegleg managed his stump. It was not only the difficulty of the descent that filled his mind but through his consciousness, like a black thread, ran the conviction that his stumbling form was the target for watchful and perhaps hostile eyes, and that it was only by the tacit

consent of the owners of those eyes that his progress was possible.

Once at the bottom, they made for the larger of the cabins where, on a veranda, were seated half a dozen men.

Pegleg, without speaking, led the way, and he and Bollard seated themselves on a rough bench against the wall of the cabin. Bollard took out a cigar and lit it. As he struck the match, he noticed that the six men, as if at a signal, turned their heads and gave him a quick look, and then as quickly fell back into an attitude of calm indifference, and continued to gaze fixedly before them as they had done on his arrival. The ice had been broken by this quick movement of their heads, and he felt at liberty to study in his turn the faces of the six strangers.

Near him, in a rocking-chair, sat a handsome old man, whose long white hair and prodigious beard gave him the air of a prophet. Iron-rimmed spectacles rested on a well-shaped aquiline nose. Bushy white eyebrows, by their extreme prominence, lent to his forehead the appearance of a sharp angle, which it did not really possess. Bollard guessed at once that this was Al Benton.

The ages of the other men varied from twenty-five to forty. Some were bearded, others clean shaven, all looked healthy and strong. The stillness of their attitude bespoke a limitless calm, but one felt that behind this calm lay a capacity for quick decision and instant action.

Suddenly the old man turned and looked fixedly at

him. The others did the same. Bollard, though the most self-possessed of men, could not but feel slightly ill at ease under the cold, passionless gaze of these dozen eyes. He returned their look for a moment, and then quietly turned his head away.

At length Benton spoke. His voice was deep and boomed like an echo from a cavern. He spoke slowly, and his companions watched him with a quickened interest and evident respect while he talked.

"Glad to see you, Bollard. Everybody speaks well of you and Jack Adams. Got word from Langton about your scheme, and sent Pegleg to meet you. Now you're here, I hope you'll make yourself ter hum. I think I got good news to give you. We know you're all right and won't talk. Langton vouches for you. Without that, you never could have got here alive."

"I understand," replied Bollard, quietly. "You can count on me. I mind my own business. If you've got things fixed up, and it suits you, Mr. Benton, I'd like to start back for Wigmore to-morrow night."

"I guess that will be all right," replied Benton. Turning to his companions, he waved his arm as a sign of dismissal. The five men got up at once, and were soon out of sight. Pegleg reappeared, and handed Benton a large envelop containing four or five letters. The old man read these, and placed them carefully in an inner pocket. Then turning to Bollard, he said:

"How long is this game of yours going to last?"

"We'll finish up the real hard work this winter. Except those that want to stay down there, all the boys

ought to be back by spring. Of course you know what the scheme really is, don't you? I told Langton."

"Sure, I do," replied Benton. "And I am getting you just the kind of boys you want. I have seventy, without counting Jim Bell's mob, and I told him to get thirty."

"He says he has," broke in Bollard, "and that his brother and he will go as foremen of the bunch, and that his father-in-law will run the place while he is away."

"That makes one hundred," said Benton. "How many have Langton and Ruby Foster got?"

"They'll have as many," replied Bollard, "and two hundred is all we want from the Territory. I sure appreciate the way all you people have worked for us. Now, about the money."

Benton waved his hand.

"That's all right. Fix it up with Langton. I leave it to him; but I want something particular besides money. I want you to fix up a place where my boys kin rest up without being bothered when they're hunted too hard after having pulled off a trick. The Argentine is too far away, and the damned U. S. consuls is getting too noisy these last years round Mexico and Central America way. Why, they say the walls of their rooms is covered with photographs and descriptions of boys in our business, sent down by the Pinkertons and the Government. Most of 'em is all wrong, but some of 'em is ac'rate. Why, last year, six of our best boys got gay and had themselves photographed in a bunch at Kansas City and sent the picture to the Pinkertons. They ain't

caught yet, but it was a fool thing to do. Four of 'em were sitting here alongside of me a minute ago. Now, I want them to get out of the country for a while and I'm counting on 'em to go with you. The only thing is they can't travel with a big bunch; but you give me an address in San Disco, and I'll have them out there in less than ten days, and they can go on the steamer and hide till you start. You need not bother to give them any money. They've got plenty. They're good fellows and speak Spanish all right."

The beating of a tin pan smote their ears.

"That's supper," said Benton. And pointing to a wooden wash-tub, beside which lay a bar of soap and an old gunny-sack in lieu of towel, he added, "Wash up if you want."

Bollard took the hint, and plunged his hands into the tub. As he did so, he became aware that some dozen men were standing in a row behind him, waiting their turn, and he was glad that he had had the first chance at the water and the towel.

When he finished, he entered the door, and found himself in a large room which seemed to be kitchen, dining-room, and sleeping-quarters combined. At one end was a large open fireplace, where two middle-aged Indian squaws were busy with pots and pans. In the middle ran a long table flanked by rough benches, and around the walls ran a double tier of bunks, perhaps twenty in number, each containing a rough mattress and an army blanket. The windows were so small that they looked like loopholes, the wooden shutters that took the place of glass being open. From beams in the roof

hung countless bunches of onions, corn, hams, and flitches of bacon. At the end of the room, facing the fire, were two doors which, as Bollard learned later, led, one into Benton's bedroom, and the other into the room used as storeroom and arsenal. The two rooms did not run to the roof, and the space above them was piled high with saddlery and harness. Over the chimney hung a large, cheap print of Jefferson Davis and a smaller one of Robert E. Lee.

Benton took his seat in a rough arm-chair at the head of the table nearest the fire, and motioned Bollard to a seat on the bench at his right hand. One by one the men came in. There were twelve of them, and when the last had entered, Benton, with a wave of his hand, said:

"Boys, this is Hank Bollard."

At these words some of the men looked at Bollard and nodded; others met the announcement with indifference.

Then, Benton, raising his voice, shouted to a clean-shaven giant of a man seated far down the table:

"Who's on watch, Deaf?"

The giant looked up, and in a surprisingly low voice said:

"Skelly and five boys."

Benton nodded and, turning to Bollard, said:

"This is Deaf Banks, one of the best men I got. Hard of hearing, but he's got so much sense, you don't have to talk to him. He jest guesses what to do and allus does it right. Damn fool sometimes, though; like all the boys when they get playin'. He and those three

fellers this side of him are four of the six I spoke of—sent their pictures to Pinkerton. They're the ones going to meet you at San Disco. You must put them under cover as soon as they git thar."

The food was plentiful, and was served by two sullen-looking Indian boys. There was no talking during the meal and it was soon over. The sun had now set, the lamp was lit, and the door and windows were closed.

"Light up, if you want to smoke," said Benton. "This is the only place where we smoke, a little because I am afraid of fire, but more on account of taking no chances of giving targets by strikin' matches in the night-time. We're pretty safe here, but I don't take no chances."

The table was now cleared away, and at one end of the room a poker-game started. Bollard noticed that the stakes were high. Two of the men played checkers, and a few occupied themselves in reading old newspapers. Two were busied in studying a railroad timetable, and noted on a piece of paper the arrival and departure of certain trains. What talking there was was in low tones, and every one seemed under a certain accustomed restraint. It was clear that Benton's word was law. Bollard wondered whether this obedience was spontaneous or the result of fierce conflict. He looked at the majestic countenance of Benton, felt the magnetism of his personality, and decided that the former was the case. Here was a born leader.

After breakfast the next morning Benton took him to see his stallions, of which he was very proud. Benton lay stress on their pedigrees, and talked of their

performances. He had forty well-bred mares and a lot of young stock coming on.

"I've got a lot," said Benton, "but I've not enough. The place is too small. You see, every job needs at least twenty horses for the men, for relays and for packing the stuff. On one trick we pulled off in Montana we used fifty. I tell you, they have to be good-blooded ones to stand this work, for the boys move awful fast. That's the only way to keep out of trouble. One of the boys got in trouble out in California. He had one of my horses. Made his get-away on it, and got here in less than six weeks on the same horse, takin' a roundabout road. Brought him in in good condition, too. That was some ride, wasn't it? You can't beat my stock, and the boys know it."

The Hole in the Ground was not only a horse ranch, but a well-stocked farm as well, with milch cows, a few sheep, and a quantity of pigs. Most of the work was done by Indians. "They never talk," said Benton, "and seem contented." They lived apart in a little group of cabins.

Sometimes Benton had as many as forty men with him, but generally eighteen or twenty. There were always six armed men on guard night and day, and carbines and ammunition ready at hand for the rest, should they be needed. But in all the thirty years that Benton had spent there, he had never been bothered by the authorities.

Bollard spent a quiet day, and had a talk with the four men who were to meet him in San Disco, arranging with them a meeting-place there. It was decided that

Pegleg would guide him to the neighborhood of Wigmore, where he would leave him.

Bollard dreaded the climb up the cliff, and was relieved to find that it was to be avoided. In the north wall of the chasm, opposite to where they had entered it, a good path had been cut, with an easy gradient wide enough for a pack-animal. This did not reach the top of the cliff, but about thirty feet below the surface of the plain turned into a wide, uprising tunnel that led into an unused dugout, where there were always two men on guard. The ride back was uneventful. Pegleg left him about ten miles north of Wigmore and, saying good-by, gave him a large fat envelop, which he asked him to hand to Langton.

CHAPTER X

DAWN was just breaking as Bollard put up his horse in the corral behind Langton's hotel. There were people at work in the kitchen, and one of them got him a key and let him in the front door. He found Everett in their room and already awake and stirring. Everett reported that his work with the newspapers had been successful, and all were singing the praises of the colonization scheme. He had been approached by many men who wished to join, but had put them off with talk of a slight delay in the plans.

"I like the people here," said Everett, "but they're a funny lot, suspicious and subdued in manner. They are very poor. They are mostly Southerners, and one can see that their spirits are affected by the defeat of that cause. Even the younger men, though they appear willing enough, do not seem to know how to start to get to work. They are fine material. Even those pointed out to me as the most lawless have a certain quiet restraint and dignity of manner. These men are ready for organization, and I anticipate no trouble in handling them."

"That is all true," said Bollard, "but remember we are going to get cowboys farther west, and I am not certain that they will mix any too well with these men.

This thing has got to move easily from the start, and we cannot have friction. I have every confidence in you, Mr. Everett, and feel that you can handle the boys; but I think it would be easier for you if I go along. Mr. Acklom left that point to my judgment and to yours, too, for that matter."

Everett's face lighted up.

"This is good news," said he. "I was on the point of asking you to come along. I feel sure that I shall need you, and I think that we will get on well together."

"No doubt about that," said Bollard. "You're the boss, and the boys must all understand that. But they'll take a rough word kinder from me than from a stranger. You can't beat Americans on a show of this kind. They are optimistic and anxious to win any game they're in, and take it for granted that their boss knows his business. Why, these men have only the vaguest notion of what they are to be required to do. They know what their pay will be and that they will get it, and they take all the rest for granted."

Just as he finished, Langton opened the door and entered. Bollard handed him the large fat envelop given him by Pegleg. Langton put it carefully in an inside pocket and said between wheezes:

"Glad to get that. It's my share of last year's work. Al was awful slow collecting, but I got it at last. There's more than six thousand dollars in that envelop."

After breakfast careful plans were made for the dates of the various shipments of the two hundred men. Not more than twenty-five were to leave from any one sta-

tion, and not more than fifty were to go on any one train. Langton was to arrange everything.

Everett and Bollard bade good-by to Langton, who wished them good luck, and taking their gripsack between them, they swung along the dusty road to the station. The same large crowd of silent loungers filled the platform, and they felt rather than noticed the covert glances shot at them; at the same time they had the feeling that these glances were much less hostile than those cast upon them on their arrival. Evidently the word had been passed that they were all right.

Some hours after leaving Wigmore, the train plunged into a desert land. Clouds of dust filled the air. The heat was great. The towns, such as they were, were far apart. In fact, they stopped oftener to take on water than to take on or let off passengers. They reached Deming just in time to catch the train for Copper City.

When they arrived at the latter place they were met at the station by Barker, Bollard's friend, the proprietor of the Zimmer House. With him were Read, the storekeeper of Apache Tejo, and Walsh of Clifton. They walked slowly along the only street in the town, deep with sand. With the exception of the bank, which looked like a small fortress, and the hotel, all the buildings were of one story and of wood. The bank and the hotel were of brick.

They took their seats on the veranda. Everett noticed that the atmosphere was different in every sense from that of Wigmore. The heat was the same, perhaps, but the air was drier and had that biting tang, born of

the desert and large dry spaces. Spiritually, the atmosphere seemed different, too. There was less secrecy. Barker and his friends had met them at the station, where their arrival seemed unnoticed. Even while there Barker had begun to talk of their affairs, which he announced to be in good order. It had been a bad cattle year. Many of the cowboys had left the ranches and gone to work in the mines and now, for some reason, the mines were laying off men in great numbers. Bollard's three friends had therefore had no difficulty in gathering together three hundred good men, who were now awaiting orders not far away. Thirty were, in fact, in Copper City, and among these were the men chosen as leaders.

"I got a fine lot of men," said Barker. "Couldn't have better luck, particularly as to the foremen. You know some of 'em, for they're old-timers, and those you don't know have heard all about you, Hank. Of course we told the boys that you was boss and would pick out the foremen yourself, but, all the same, I guess you'd better follow our lead. Read, Walsh, and I know these boys better than you; so you'd better abide by our pickin'."

"All right," said Bollard. "I can trust you, boys; but you got it wrong about me being the boss. The boss here is Mr. Everett. Jack Adams picked him out, and I am going along as number two."

Barker grunted.

"Have it your own way, Hank; but the boys here will work better for you than for a stranger."

"Oh, we'll get on well enough," said Bollard, care-

lessly; but in his heart he felt Barker to be right, and was glad that he had decided to go with Everett, for he knew that the cowboys would be harder to handle than the men from Indian Territory. The latter were accustomed to organization and a real discipline. The fact that it was born in rebellion and continued in opposition to the law of the land strengthened that organization and discipline by an admixture of caution and secrecy.

But the cowboys of the ranches were of a different sort. Their minds were not poisoned by defeat in war and hatred of the victor. Their lives were as open as the desert spaces in which they lived. Except when on a round-up, there was little discipline and virtually no organization. What there was came from loyalty to their employer. Not to him personally, however, but to the ranch he controlled and to the cattle he owned, represented, as if by a flag, by the form of the branding-iron which burned into the wincing hide of the cattle, and into the careless mind of the cowboy the visible mark of ownership of property to be defended. This spirit of loyalty to the respective brands of their ranches took the place of local pride, a strong factor throughout America, and produced what jealousy and friction existed.

After lunch in the dining-room a meeting was held behind closed doors at which were present all the twenty foremen.

Everett was introduced to them by Barker as the manager of the "ranching scheme" they were going into.

For a long minute Everett looked pleasantly into the faces of the men seated around him. Then he spoke:

"Barker has told you who I am. He speaks also for Walsh and Read. Bollard, who is going with me as second in command, is the personal friend of some of you and known by reputation to all. It is known that he is the friend of Jack Adams, and you boys know who is behind this game and to whom you have to look for your pay. It is to me you have to look for orders.

"Barker has explained that we are on a ranching scheme. I don't intend to go into details, but your own minds will give you a hint if you stop for a moment and think that we are taking five hundred men, and all that we require of these men is that they are able to ride, pack, and shoot. The risks you are to run are not much greater than those for which your daily life here calls. You will be well fed and well paid, and those who do not wish to remain in the country after the matter is well in hand will have their return paid. Those who wish to stay will be helped to get land and settle down. The climate is good. Now, there are two things I want clearly understood. The first is that no one except the foremen leaves here with a gun in his pocket. What arms are necessary will be furnished by the company later on. Second, each foreman is responsible for the conduct of the fifteen men under him. He has to keep his men in good shape while this job is on.

"You boys are first going to San Disco, and from there by sea to a point near where we'll begin to work. I shall try and make this stay in San Disco as short as

I can, though we must count upon certain possible delays. It is vitally important that every one behaves well during this week and keeps his mouth shut. We don't want any newspapers mixed up in this game. I have arranged for good quarters, and the whole five hundred men are to be scattered around in small hotels and boarding-houses in one locality. Each foreman will get the address of his quarters on arrival. Each foreman handles the railroad tickets for his bunch. Barker and his two friends here have what money is needed to get you all to San Disco.

"That's about all. I don't want much discussion, but you boys can talk among yourselves and decide on what questions you want to ask. Hank and I will leave the room while you are doing this. I give you fifteen minutes."

Having thus spoken, and looked at his watch, Everett and Bollard went out on the veranda, shutting the door behind them.

"I call that a good talk," said Barker at once. "Everett's good enough for me, and you all know Bollard. You fellows were all out of a job, and now I got you one, and a good one, too. What's the use of talking? Let's call the boss back and tell him we've got nothing to say."

The eldest man among the foremen was Watson of the Diamond A outfit, a lank, grizzled veteran of many a conflict with nature and men. He shuffled his feet and looked around at his companions, then carefully cut a chew of tobacco from a large black plug. Having hidden this beneath his heavy mustache, he rapped with

a clenched fist on the table, and spoke with a nasal drawl:

"If you ast me, I'm for cuttin' out all talk and gettin' on the payroll at once. Hank Bollard is good enough for me, and if the show is good enough for him, it's good enough for us all, I guess."

Murmurs of approval and the shuffling of feet greeted his remarks, and Watson, turning to Barker, said:

"Call in the boss."

This was done, and Barker explained the situation.

Everett smiled and said:

"Thank you, boys. Now for drinks all around!"

THAT night Everett and Bollard left for Deming, where the next morning they caught a fast express for San Disco. When they reached San Disco, they went direct to the Palace Hotel. They had hardly reached their room when Mr. Evans, their agent, was announced. He greeted Bollard warmly, and, turning to Everett, said:

"When do you expect the men?"

"They'll begin arriving in six days' time," said Everett. "If all goes well, a fortnight should see the mob here."

"Have you got their names?"

"No. But I have the names of the foremen, each of which will be in charge of fifteen men or thereabouts."

"Well, I have arranged for quarters for the five hundred men in different boarding-houses and cheap hotels. Here are two names that I want you to keep

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in your mind. The first one, Isaac Benz, is, under me, in charge of the whole show. He keeps a cigar-store down-street, and is the real power behind the police force and is also mixed up with a big detective agency; but he works for me first, last, and all the time. I'll send for him when I get through talking.

"The other name, Joseph Howard, is that of my lawyer, who is fixed up to go bail for and to get out of trouble, no matter what it is, any one of the boys. You want to give these names to each of the foremen of all your groups. I have arranged for Benz or some of his men to meet your people as they arrive, and they will be guided to their lodgings. Once there, a list of their names must be placed in Benz's hands. It's likely that your boys will be a rough lot, but if your foremen are good men, I don't believe there will be much trouble in handling them. This is a big town, but the arrival of five hundred husky boys will attract notice. I fixed that up, I guess. Day after to-morrow there is a revivalist coming here to drive the devil out of San Disco. As fast as they get here, your boys will be tipped off to say they have come to hear the revivalist. The Reverend Doctor Bowy is as good a cover for your men as any other.

"Now, another thing. We've got a primary election coming off in ten days or so, and as my friends are a little short of votes, I intend to vote all your boys as repeaters. That, again, will make 'em strong with the police, for out here the cops stand in with the politicians. Between you and me, we brought Doctor Bowy here to preach. He has six hundred trained followers,

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choir, band, collectors, and cappers. We intend to vote his crowd, too. He's a great old fraud. He'll make a fine cover for your men."

"All right," said Everett. "I suppose you know your business and doubtless all will be well. But how about shipping my men?"

"That will be all right," said Evans. "I've got a four-thousand-ton steamer discharging cargo now. When that's finished, I'll fill up with your stuff and have bunks knocked up between-decks for the men. You can count on sailing in fifteen days."

CHAPTER XI

THE next day Everett received a long letter from Acklom, which contained good and bad news.

The good news came from Harding, who had written Wallace a long letter to the effect that President Obregon's health had taken a turn for the better, thanks to the careful treatment given him by the doctor who was bent upon earning Estrada's thirty thousand dollars. The longer he lived the more time they had for preparation, though if Obregon recovered sufficiently to take the field against them in person, it would add to their difficulties. For, despite his age, his name was so linked with terror that the fear of brutal reprisals might weaken Estrada's following.

Carlos was in constant communication with the Hualtecos, and their organization was being perfected. He assured Harding that they would be ready to move on Aldaban directly the carbines and Everett's five hundred Americans arrived. The plan was for Harding, Ladbrook, Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez, after having bribed as many of the higher army officers as possible, to fly to the Hualtecos as soon as news came of Everett's arrival in Lipaza; and, once in the Hualtecos country, to raise the banner of revolt and march direct upon

Aldaban. Ellison and the five Americans at Cruz Chico were to remain there. They had quantities of dynamite, and had got together a scratch lot of carbines with which to arm three hundred Jamaica negroes who formed part of the labor force at work on the railroad and upon whom they felt they could depend. Moreover, money would be provided with which to bribe the officer commanding the garrison, and should Don Eusebio not turn up at Cruz Chico with his *Rurales*, they felt confident that they could prevent Obregon's getting the German artillery even if it were landed.

The bad news was that Mrs. Ladbroke had refused to remain in the Adirondacks with Mrs. Harding and had disappeared from there. Mrs. Harding had followed her to New York, where all trace of Mrs. Ladbroke had been lost. Unfortunately, Wallace had been out of town for the several days during which these events were taking place; so that Acklom had no knowledge of their occurrence until Wallace returned. When he had come back and taken the matter in hand, he found that a lady of Mrs. Ladbroke's description had sailed on the last steamer for Cruz Chico. Wallace had cabled Harding the news, and suggested that his wife be allowed to return to keep her eye upon her friend lest troublesome complications arise. Harding had seen the matter in the same light and had cabled for his wife to follow. She was leaving in a day or so. Acklom appeared to treat the matter lightly, though one could read between the lines that he was aware of the danger of this feminine complication, which appeared to bore him.

In a few days the men began to arrive. They were met at the station and led to their lodgings. They had one and all put on their best clothes for the journey and presented a good appearance. Everett and Bollard went the rounds of the lodging-houses and explained matters to the men through the foremen. They were surprised to find that no one seemed loath to become an irregular voter. They took the news with indifference, but grinned with pleasure when they heard of the ten dollars they were to receive. They were wonderfully docile, too, about posing as converts to old Doctor Bowry's eloquence.

They attended the meetings en masse, even bearing banners, singing the hymns lustily, and taking in every way an active part in the service. They liked old Bowry, and were impressed by his tireless energy. They called him "the big chief" and seemed to think that he was in some way connected with their own enterprise and felt he would bring it luck. It could not be said, however, that their souls were much affected. Directly the meetings broke up, they made a rush for the bar-rooms and worse places, and had to be closely watched to be kept out of trouble. However, Benz's men seemed to be everywhere and proved good shepherds to the wild flock.

Before election day arrived, rehearsals took place. The manner of voting was carefully explained, and each man was given five names which he was to vote, together with the addresses of the men voted. Election day passed without any mistake being made, and all hands were paid the ten dollars. Doctor Bowry's meeting was a

failure that night. Most of his men joined with Everett's in spending the election money. It was a wild night.

Three days after the election, all was ready for departure. Evans had forced his men to work night and day, and the interior of the *Caledonia*, one of the best ships of the Coast Line, looked like that of a transport.

Everett and Bollard, with several of the foremen, had superintended the loading of the ship, and the embarkation of the men took place at night, and was accomplished in a quiet, orderly manner. By one A.M. all were on board, and at three the *Caledonia* threaded her way through the harbor at half-speed, and at a good twelve knots reached the open sea at last.

They were well out from the land when the men began to gather on deck. The sea was smooth. To nine-tenths of them this was their first contact with the ocean. They were for the most part silent and watchful; some appeared to be even a little intimidated. Everett and Bollard moved among them. Though not nervous, they did not like the quiet and silence. It was unnatural that five hundred men, mostly young, should be so still. The shore was far away, and a little noise could do no harm.

So Everett called old Watson, the late foreman of the Diamond A, and an old friend of Bollard's, and whispered in his ear. Watson nodded and disappeared. In a few moments he was on deck with a large accordion, with which from youth he had been an expert. He seated himself on a coil of rope and shouted out in his high, nasal voice:

"Come on, you mavericks! You are rounded up at last. I am going to put a musical brand on you. Now take a long breath, and all together, rememberin' old Doctor Bowry, we'll strike up that good old song, 'Heaven is Our Happy Home.'"

The idea seemed good to the men. Some laughed, and nearly all crowded around Watson, and in a moment five hundred throats were bawling in unison. Everett and Bollard joined in. Hymn after hymn was sung, and for more than an hour they kept it up till they appeared to be in real good humor. Then Everett stopped Watson's playing and shouted out:

"Now, boys, let's get a bit of sleep, for we've got some work to do to-morrow. Good night all, and good luck to you!"

"Good night, good night," was heard on all sides. Then a certain group whispered together a moment and shouted out as one man:

"Good night, General!"

Everett smiled, and touched his hat. The men went quietly below.

The days they had spent in San Disco had borne useful fruit. Their attendance en masse at Bowry's meetings, taking part in the same services, singing the same hymns, marching in the parades, and following the same banner had perforce evoked a certain spirit of unity. The men had got to know one another. Friendships were made, and finally election day and the wild night that succeeded it had welded the men into a fairly harmonious whole. In everything the cow-boys had taken the lead. The men from Indian Territory were

at first shy and even diffident. They were quieter and more reserved in habit; but little by little this reserve had worn off, and they fell into the gay, careless ways of the cow-punchers. This had been brought about largely by Watson and the other Arizona foremen, who, following Everett's instructions, had gone out of their way to make friends and to be civil to the men from farther east.

On the way to their cabin Everett and Bollard ran into Deaf Banks and his three companions, who were evidently waiting for them. They had come on board ship two days before she sailed, and had been in hiding ever since. They had not as yet mixed with the other men; they had not even been assigned berths.

Bollard introduced them to Everett, who, knowing of Banks's deafness, shouted out:

"I am not going to assign you, boys, to any of the groups or put you under any foreman. Bollard tells me that you are very handy men and that you speak Spanish well; so I shall keep you more or less on my personal staff. That is if you make good. If you don't make good as staff-officers, I'll put you in the group under old Watson. I guess you'll get on with him all right."

Banks grinned, and said in his unnaturally low voice:

"If you don't mind, we'll stick to you, Boss. We men are accustomed to work together, and if you want a hard trick pulled off, you can bet on us. We're easy-going all right if we're not crossed, and I don't guess the boys will be jealous of us. No one but Al Benton's lot knows who we are, and they'll keep their mouths shut.

We fellers are glad to make this get-away, and you can bet we'll make good, so's to show we thank you for helping us out."

The sea remained smooth the entire voyage. Beginning with the first day, Everett instituted the mildest form of discipline, ordering each foreman at dawn to call the roll of his group, and accustoming the men to look to their foremen by insisting that all complaints, and these were few, be made through him. Group by group they were called upon deck, and each man was furnished with saddle, carbine, revolver, and other equipment. No card-playing or games of chance were allowed. This caused a little grumbling; but as the food was good, and as there was plenty of tobacco, with a concert every night, the men were kept in good humor.

On the fifth day Talco was reached in the early morning. Barring a small and inefficient breakwater, it was an open roadstead. The little town was close to the white beach, its thatched roofs lending a somber brown note to the vivid green of the waving palm-trees.

For miles inland the country was flat, and then rose foothills in what seemed almost a succession of terraces, till finally the horizon was blocked by the dim, blue outline of the mighty Cordilleras.

No other ship was in port, and the *Caledonia* had hardly cast anchor when the *jefe politico* appeared on the beach, clad in full regalia, and, entering a small boat manned by half-naked, but heavily hatted, natives, was quickly pulled alongside. Everett and Bollard, together with the captain, met him at the gangway, and he was escorted to the saloon, where drinks and

cigarettes were furnished. After a prolonged pause, which Everett was too tactful to interrupt, the *jefe* produced a large envelop and asked which was General Everett.

Everett opened the letter, and found that it was from the governor of the State of Lipaza. It welcomed him and his friends and stated that all the *jefes politicos* in his state had been instructed to offer him every assistance. In view of the circumstances, the governor deemed it unwise for him to meet the general personally, but that in a few days he would send a trusted friend to consult with him and to extend him a more personal welcome.

These formalities having been finished, Everett arranged that all the lighters in the town be placed at his immediate disposal for unloading the ship. In earnest of future payments, a hundred dollars in gold were placed in the hands of the *jefe politico*. The money was received with a bow, and the *jefe* announced that five thousand pack animals, with two hundred skilled packers, twelve hundred horses, and one thousand head of cattle were in the immediate neighborhood.

From the tone of the governor's letter and the almost subservient attitude of the *jefe*, it appeared that Acklom's magic wand had been waved over the locality and that, far from there being any obstacles thrown in the way of the expedition, its path had been made smooth. There was nothing to prevent their joining the Hualtecos.

Everett and Bollard went ashore with the *jefe*. In half an hour they returned, having secured the use of

a large clearing back of the town for their camp. They sent ashore four foremen, with their sixty men, armed with axes, and these proceeded to put a strong barbed-wire fence about the camp. By this time twenty lighters were alongside the ship. The ports were opened, and the process of unloading began. By night-fall the camp was fenced in, and a goodly pile of supplies had risen in the middle of it, and a guard of fifteen men were set out to protect it. They worked with such a will that in three days the ship was unloaded, and on the fourth day sailed away.

While the *Caledonia* remained in the harbor, with the exception of the camp guard the men had slept and eaten on board. With the expedition at last in camp, Everett's skill as an organizer was called upon to the utmost.

By arrangement with the *jefe politico*, a market was established every morning near the camp, where perishable supplies were bought, and these, with the meat from five head of cattle slaughtered daily, coffee, and sugar, formed a capital ration for the men.

The camp presented a compact appearance. It had only one entrance, and facing this were pitched the only three tents the expedition boasted. The central one was used by Everett and Bollard, the others by the doctors and the telephonists. The men slept on the ground, using blankets and slickers, with their saddles as pillows. Each group of fifteen, with its foreman, was camped separately, close to the barbed-wire fence. In the center were placed the supplies.

Everett knew the dangers linked with a long stay

at the coast; fever, for one thing, and the charms and temptations of the languorous tropic nights for another. Despite their dark skin, the women of Lipaza were attractive, and the men easy-going and friendly. To prevent Talco from becoming a little Capua to his force, Everett made every effort to keep his men so busy during the day that they would be glad to sleep when night fell. But youth would not be denied, and Everett's task proved to be no easy one.

Despite the great heat at that season, the men worked incessantly from dawn till dusk, stimulated by the presence of their leaders, who shared their labors and who fired them with the spirit of emulation.

With the setting of the sun a gentle sea-breeze sprang up, rattling the stiff leaves of the palm-trees, like a mighty chorus of castanets calling to the dance. The disappearance of the sun released from the soil countless tropical aromas, which vied with one another in exciting the senses. The bright moonlight shimmered in the open spaces between the trees, low laughter was heard, and the tinkling of guitars and snatches of song.

The men threw themselves down beside their campfires and seemed almost too tired to eat, but none failed to answer the call to food when it came. Then strengthened and refreshed by the wholesome fare and the strong coffee, youth asserted itself, and many were the glances thrown through the barbed-wire fence at the softly-moving figures of the Talco natives as they gathered shyly about the inclosure. Timidity prevailed at first, and the first night no natives visited the camp; but the opening of the market the next day established

friendly relations almost at once. Nearly all the cowboys could speak a little Spanish, and they were not loath to air their knowledge in chaff and jests with the Lipaza women. Many of the men took pains to shave, and some put on neckerchiefs of bright colors. These, however, soon disappeared, and were quickly seen on the necks of the prettier women.

The Talco men hid their jealousy, if they had any, and attempted to keep the women at their side by song and music. Their efforts were failures; for wherever a guitar was heard, impromptu dances began. The dancers were the women and the Americans; the musicians were the native men.

One afternoon as he and Bollard, together with the two doctors, were smoking and chatting in comfortable camp-chairs, a horse approached at a gallop. Its rider leaped to the ground and, with a military salute, announced the approach of a representative of the Governor of Lipaza, accompanied by a party of friends.

In a few moments the party arrived, five in all. For political reasons they neither bore official titles nor wore uniforms. Two of them belonged to wealthy families of Mescalita whose parents had opposed Obregon, and in consequence had been exiled by him. They had become citizens of Pulqueria, and welcomed the chance to aid any movement leading to the downfall of Obregon. It was from the ranches of these men that all the live stock had come. Everett was surprised and delighted to recognize in the fifth a native of Aldaban, named Lin-ares, a relative of General Carlos.

In the course of conversation light was thrown on the cause of the friendliness to the enterprise shown by the Government of Pulqueria. It appeared that an understanding had been arrived at by which, should Everett's movements be successful, a considerable strip of territory extending the entire length of the frontier between Pulqueria and Mescalita was to be annexed to the former country and become part of the State of Lipaza. Everett knew that Acklom had traveled in Pulqueria in years gone by, and now easily recognized what powerful friends he must have made.

Linares asked Everett to delay his departure for two days, saying that he had arranged for three hundred Hualtecos to join him to act as guides and to assist with the pack-animals. They were due to arrive on the morrow. Everett was delighted to learn that instead of marching two hundred miles into the interior parallel to the frontier, it had been found possible to reduce this distance to fewer than one hundred from the sea-coast.

Linares further said that the plan was to march to the base of the Cordilleras, and then to turn south and cross the frontier into the Hualtecos country. Once there, the carbines and ammunition would be distributed to the natives, who were already gathered and ready to receive them. Free from impedimenta, the five hundred Americans and a chosen band of Hualtecos were then to seize a pass crossing the Cordilleras.

CHAPTER XII

EVERETT had counted upon the necessity of making two journeys in order to transport all the supplies to the new base; but the arrival of the three hundred Hualtecos, who were skilled in handling animals, gave him enough drivers, and he determined to do the work in one move.

The night before his departure he sent Watson of the Diamond A with three groups of men to round up the animals and keep them in their three respective bands, horses, mules, and cattle, close to the corrals and "to ride herd" till dawn. There was little sleep that night. The air was filled with the lowing of kine, the neighing of horses, and the braying of mules, the barking of dogs, and the shouting of men. Everything had been packed in an almost iron-clad fashion, and each load weighed approximately one hundred pounds. Nearly seven hundred mules were needed for the car-bines, and one thousand were required for the ammunition.

At four A.M. the deep note of Everett's whistle sounded throughout the camp. Coffee was quickly served to the men, and before sun-up, by the waning light of the moon, the loading of the material began. Already the force had been shaken together, and the men knew their places and fell into them with that

natural ease only to be found among Americans accustomed from their youth not alone to individual initiative, but to team work as well.

The first camp had been chosen in advance, twenty miles due east. It was a long march, to be sure, for the first day; but Everett knew there was nothing like a long march to shake down a caravan and to find out its weak spots. Besides, the country was friendly, and he had no fear of attack on the march.

At six o'clock the movement began. Everett, with Deaf Banks and his men, accompanied by Linares and the Hualtecos guides, led the array. Behind them came the long line of mules. The cow-boys and native herdsmen rode on each side, keeping the animals on the road with shouts and cries. Off the road, but parallel to it, came in three groups the herds of cattle and reserves of horses and mules, causing destruction to the crops in their path; but this could not be helped, as unloaded beasts cannot be driven with laden animals without producing endless confusion. Bollard and Watson brought up the rear with thirty men.

This journey led through an almost flat plain. The camp they were heading for lay at the base of the first foot-hills. The road was wide and sandy. On each side of it grew, almost like a wall, different varieties of thorny cacti. Beyond, as far as the eye could reach, stretched vast fields of Indian corn, broken by large patches of pepper plants, tobacco, and other tropical produce. Here and there rose a solitary tree. The air was perfectly still. The sun poured forth a pitiless heat.

A vast cloud of dust rose and gleamed like a rolling mountain of yellow gold under the burning sun. Despite the discomfort, Everett's heart was filled with joy. He knew that success or failure lay largely in his hands, but he had no fear. Never to his knowledge had such an expedition, so thoroughly equipped, been sent on such a mission since the days of the Spanish conquistadores.

Though little given to vain imaginings, the romance of his adventure gripped him, and for a moment his practical mind relaxed and permitted his fancy to run riot. He felt like Cortes leading his men, and, turning his glance upon his companions, was almost surprised not to see them clad in shining armor and bearing long swords or arquebuses in their hands.

As they reached the very limit of the plain and halted on the banks of a small stream that tumbled from the foothills close at hand, Linares said:

"Here's where we camp."

The appearance of the country had changed. Plantations had ceased, and in their place rose countless clumps of mesquite-bush and greasewood and other growth of an uncultivated soil; but in the open patches there was sufficient pasture for their animals. The stream itself was fairly wooded and attractive to the eye, tired by the glare of the plain.

Everett sent Banks and two of his men to turn the laden animals in his direction. A fourth was ordered back at full gallop to bring up men to cut with their machetes an opening in the cactus wall and clear the crossing-place of the stream of underbrush and to bring up two hundred men for the unloading.

Everything worked smoothly, and in three hours from the arrival of Everett all the beasts had been unladen and turned out to pasture; goods had been piled, cattle slaughtered, and the evening meal was cooked on blazing fires.

Before turning in that night Everett called the leaders and foremen together and made such changes in the method of march as were necessary to meet the altered conditions of travel in the hills. There was still a good moon so men were sent forward under Linares to choose the next camping-place. It was decided that a ten-mile march was all that could be undertaken. Linares calculated that the distance they had between them and the base of the Cordilleras, at the point where they would turn southward in order to cross the frontier of Mescalita, was about eighty miles.

"Call it ten days," said Everett, "if we have luck; and four days more should see us at the pass. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Linares.

"How far north from the point where we turn toward Mescalita lies the city of Lipaza, where the governor lives?"

"Only about thirty miles," replied Linares.

Everett summoned the telephone men and gave them orders to establish connection with Lipaza, where there was a telegraphic station, and to string their wire for fifty miles south of that town, followed the Mescalita trail. He then wrote a letter to the Governor of Lipaza, explaining that the cable would be cut at Cruz Chico, and

that the telephone line would be needed to get news to the outer world.

Although Acklom had not given his reasons for wishing to establish telephone communication with a telegraphic base, Everett was shrewd enough to guess that the real purpose in his mind was to use the news of the revolution as a means of affecting the value of the foreign bonds of Mescalita on the stock market. However, his orders were to establish the telephone line; that was enough for him.

Everett was right in his estimate of the time required for the march, for it was on the tenth day that the expedition reached the base of the Cordilleras. He found the telephone men had accomplished such wonders that their wire was already almost at his camp. The governor of Lipaza had made no difficulty about the telephone, but seemed, on the contrary, familiar with the plan.

Refreshed by a two days' rest, the caravan resumed its way. The landscape never varied and the road lay through a wonderful forest. At the end of the second day they crossed the Mescalitan frontier, of which, however, there was no visible sign except that in the early hours of the day after crossing it they came upon Hualtec villages. For after countless wars with the rulers at Aldaban, the Hualtecos had retired sullenly to the hills, and had become mountain-dwellers. The villages were small in size, being rarely more than fifty leaf-thatched huts surrounding a corral, in which at night were gathered the flocks and herds of the little community; but they were never far apart, and Everett realized

that here indeed they had not only an oppressed race and hostile to their rulers, and therefore ready to his hand, but a population so numerous that the confidence with which Don Carlos had promised twenty thousand men appeared justified.

It was evident that their arrival was not only expected, but welcomed with joy.

Yet it was apparent that the Hualtecos were not anxious for the strangers to stop at their villages. They also were afraid of the destruction of their crops by the passing of the troops, though Everett took every pain to avoid damage.

On reaching the first village, Linares sent men ahead to arrange for a camping-place; and when it was reached Everett found that a market had been established to which, from miles around, was brought every product of the soil. Thus they traveled by easy marches for four days, until they reached the spot appointed by Don Carlos for their base.

Before the camp was finished, the native chieftains began to arrive. They were few in number. The Hualtecos tribe was divided into five groups, each ruled by a hereditary leader. The five divisions looked up to Don Carlos and those of his blood as their leaders. Each tribe had agreed to furnish four thousand men and five hundred horses. The organization of these forces had long been under way, and when the camp was finished, the distribution of arms and equipment among the Hualtecos began.

These people had been given to the use of firearms for many years, and their weapons, although of an in-

ferior sort, had served to teach them at least what a rifle meant. As fast as the guns were given out, the men were divided into hundreds, allotted five rounds of ammunition to a man, and taken to targets erected by Everett some distance from the camp. There the mechanism of the arm was explained to the men, and the five shots were fired, two shots at a hundred yards and three at three hundred. Their training with the old-fashioned weapons in their possession stood them in good stead, and the shooting, on the whole, was far from bad. Linares, indeed, was delighted with it:

"They can shoot all round Obregon's soldiers," said he, "excepting, of course, the *Rurales* under Don Eusebio, who are good shots. Either from fear or parsimony, Obregon is very sparing of ammunition, and regular target practice is unknown."

The black eyes of the speaker glowed as he said this, and the usual calm of his manner was broken by almost enthusiasm as he added:

"We'll wipe 'em off the face of the earth. We Hualtecos have been waiting fifty years for this chance to get square, and every carbine will be held by a hand steadied by hatred and guided by an eye directed by a cold longing for revenge."

For the moment Linares stepped out from behind the screen of almost European civilization which had concealed his personality in Aldaban, and stood forth in all the nakedness of a savage Indian whose heart quivered with hatred toward his oppressors. Though coming from the highest class in his tribe, and taller

and finer-featured than the mass of his people, one saw that he differed little from them.

Now that the plain was covered with the recruits, Everett was able to study the Hualtecos en masse, and was struck by the marked resemblance they bore to one another. In height they were under five feet five, robustly built, with short necks, square shoulders, enormous chests, and thick, bowed legs. On the war-path they wore no hats, their coarse black hair falling to their shoulders behind, and cut straight across the forehead. About this was bound a strip of cloth. The common soldiers wore a black filet. The officers, according to their grade, one of a different color, until the chieftain was reached, who, with a band of gold, wore a crown of brightly colored quezal feathers. They looked much out of place on the western continent, and seemed to belong rather to one of those hardy races which inhabit the flanks of the Himalayas. All wore the same costume, and their brown-and-black serapes made a fitting uniform. Each one carried on his back a bag filled with flour and dried meat, and from a belt hung a smaller bag for ammunition. His right hand grasped a carbine. In looking them over, Everett saw that they were perfect material for his needs, and he felt himself swell with pride at the thought that he was one of the leaders of such an army.

For two months they had been gathering under a chieftain named Estaban, and the day of the arrival of the Americans Estaban had sent word to Don Carlos. Now all waited for an answer from Aldaban.

Soon after his arrival Everett had formed a machine-

gun squad under the leadership of three cowboys who had seen service in the United States artillery. There had been no news of a hostile move on the part of Obregon, but Everett decided to seize at once and fortify the pass through the Cordilleras. This he did, using two thousand Hualtecos infantry and his machine-guns, holding in immediate reserve the two thousand five hundred cavalry of the Hualtecos and the five hundred Americans. After that there was nothing to do but wait.

CHAPTER XIII

ON his return from New York, Harding arrived in Aldaban on a Thursday; but to avoid arousing suspicion, no meeting took place between him and Estrada and his friends until the usual Saturday afternoon poker-game.

However, he and Ladbrook had a long interview. Harding noticed that the latter appeared somewhat more restrained than usual and very irritable. At the best of times Ladbrook was never expansive, but, taken together with his marked irritability and the evident raggedness of his nerves, a condition which Harding, in all his long acquaintance with Ladbrook, had never before noticed, it made a deep impression upon him.

They dined together in Ladbrook's house, and after dinner fell into comfortable chairs on the veranda and lit cigars. Harding spoke enthusiastically of Everett's initial success and his apparently strong backing, but Ladbrook did not reply.

"Though the unknown backer is generous enough as far as we are concerned," Harding went on, "his contract puts a pretty strong lien on this old country, for it takes the mines, forests, ports, and so forth. But the lien won't last forever, and Mescalita will benefit enormously in the end. Why, the fellow seems to be a sort of altruist. Everett says the man is going to spend

his profits on starting a school system and educating these savages. That may be a good thing in the long run, but it will be a hard job to start. However, it's none of our funeral." Then, looking up sharply, he added: "What's the matter with you, Dick? You don't seem to take any interest. Aren't you pleased that the game is going so well?"

Ladbrook's voice was quiet enough, and his words came slowly; but the tone was bitterness itself as he answered:

"You remember, Wesley, the night before you left with the girls, you packed up all your private papers in a box and gave it to me for safekeeping during your absence. You told me to bury the box in the courtyard here. Before doing so, it occurred to me to go over my own papers, in order to bury them, too. Well, I made a systematic search, and found nothing of importance until I came to Margaret's writing-desk, where, in a drawer containing a lot of old household accounts, I came across a letter from that dog, Don Eusebio. It was damn compromising, and from its tone appeared to be no isolated note.

"Now, we are old pals, Wesley, and I can talk to you pretty frankly, I know, but I feel it is weak on my part to talk about my private affairs to any one, even to you, and were it not for this game we're in together, on which this letter may have real bearing, I wouldn't say anything about it, but simply attend to the matter in my own way and at my own good time."

After a pause he stretched his arms above his head and continued in the same bitter tone:

"I'm not much of a woman's man at best; my gambler's life has prevented that. I never made much of a study of woman's character. I wish I had now; perhaps Margaret would have run straighter. But there is no use in kicking. I've got to face the facts and arrange my private affairs without queering the revolution. In a way I'm glad Margaret was not here when I found the letter, for I might have made a damn fool of myself. My first instinct was to go after Don Eusebio, but a moment's thought prevented that stupid action. I can settle his hash during the revolution. I love that girl still in a sort of way, but since I found that letter my heart has been burning with a mixture of hatred, distrust of all the world, and above all, I guess, injured pride. Ever since I found the letter it has been hard work to keep on the job with Estrada and Carlos. You say she's gone with Violet to the mountains?"

It was with a real feeling of relief that Harding heard his friend broach the matter frankly himself. Nevertheless, he decided not to go into details as to what Violet and he had learned of the affair. He merely said:

"What you say about Margaret and the letter you found does not altogether surprise me, for both Violet and I have feared that there was something between her and Don Eusebio. I am glad that you see that this is not the moment to deal with him. As you say, we can settle with him during the revolution. One thing is hard to do, and that is to leave the killing of that man entirely to you. I'd like to have a hand in it."

They did not speak of the subject again, and on

Saturday came the usual meeting in the back room of the bank. The door was hardly closed when Estrada, turning to Harding, said:

"It has been difficult to wait till this hour before asking you for news. Tell us, my friend, the exact situation in New York."

"Couldn't be better," said Harding. "We've got plenty of money and Everett is getting together five hundred good Americans, who should be in the Hualtecocos country in a few weeks. They bring with them twenty thousand carbines to arm Don Carlos's people, and all necessary supplies. The man Everett found to back this scheme knows his business and is sparing no expense. He's a strong man all right, for he has fixed it up with Pulqueria to let the expedition land at Talco. I brought back a copy of the agreement that Everett signed on behalf of us all. I think you gentlemen will agree that it is a fair and business-like document and is not too hard in its terms. You will see that the Government of Mescalita—which, of course, means you, Estrada, and your friends here—receives ten per cent. of the net proceeds of whatever enterprises the backer of the revolution undertakes. To be sure, he virtually puts his hand on the whole country; but the country will benefit vastly by its development, and the Government gets its ten per cent. But whether you like it or not, the contract, of course, stands, as Everett had your full power of attorney to act.

"Now, before you read this contract, which I have here, I must tell you that I am personally in entire ignorance as to who the backer is. Everett assures me

that although he intends to save himself from all loss in the business, yet what profit he makes he's going to turn back into Mescalita in building up schools and colleges. I call him a regular good fairy, and propose that before going any further we all empty our glasses in drinking the very good health of the great unknown."

The formality of health-drinking was achieved with almost unseemly haste by the Mescalians, so eager were they to see the contents of the contract.

The copy had been made in Spanish by Everett, and this was seized by Estrada and read, with the eyes of Henriquez and Carlos following his long finger as it traveled slowly across the printed page. The reading accomplished, they exchanged glances. Carlos was the first to speak:

"No es muy fuerte?"

"Si, si," replied the others.

Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, Estrada said:

"Pero que hacer?"

"Que hacer," echoed the other two, shrugging their shoulders as a look of resignation came into their faces—the look common to all Spaniards when faced with what seems to them to be the inevitable, a look inherited, doubtless, from their fatalistic Arab ancestors.

Harding, who had watched them narrowly, waited for them to break silence; but when they remained voiceless, with their eyes lowered to the ground, his knowledge of Spanish character moved him to be the first to speak, knowing full well that what his friends really wanted was to be shown a way in which they could be led gently into the path of acquiescence.

"You see, my friends," Harding at length said, "that the American has, as is always the case, done his best to protect himself in this enterprise. Ladbrook, Everett, and I know the high sense of honor which actuates you three gentlemen. Between us and you no contract is necessary; but remember that this gentleman in New York is a complete stranger to you all and your high qualities. It is only natural that he should try to protect himself in this venture. Remember, Everett found no one to undertake this enterprise until he met this man. The business men whom he approached wanted fifty per cent. of all profits; our unknown friend asks for ten. He must be of an imaginative, almost romantic temperament, and men of romance and imagination are more apt to be high-minded gentlemen than mere men of affairs. I appeal to you. Is there not a certain Spanishness in this act? For me there is. Let us drink his health again!"

Harding's words put the men at their ease, and it was in all sincerity and with friendly smiles that they emptied their glasses to the health of the stranger. Their good humor was completely restored when Ladbrook showed them a deposit-slip for the sum of \$154,800 that Acklom had paid for the interim certificates issued by Obregon's government in payment for the railroad work, the bonds for which they called not being even yet printed.

"That is a proof of confidence," said Ladbrook. Turning to Estrada, he added, "This sum goes in with your money, Emilio, to help pay for the war at this end."

All doubt now seemed removed from the Mescalían

minds, and the three men became cheerful and talkative.

"Well, gentlemen," said Harding, "let's get down to business. I'd like to hear a report from each of you three upon the exact situation here."

Estrada arranged himself comfortably in his chair and, twirling his mustache, began:

"In the first place, Obregon's health is much better; so much so in fact that Donna Elvira and Eusebio have for the moment apparently ceased to plot for the succession. Obregon is even talking of holding a review of the troops on the national holiday, three weeks hence. Also he has sent out orders for Congress to meet to transact special business. Schwartz is behind this move, I am sure. He wants a bill passed giving him the monopoly of the banking business here, and money voted at once for payment of the artillery coming from Germany. He says that Krupp will not ship the guns until Schwartz informs him that the money for the payment is in his bank here in Aldaban.

"Since you have been away, Wesley, we have not been idle. By the liberal use of money in the right quarters we have got on our side many officers of all grades in the army. It is not money alone that has brought these men to our side; it is their hatred and dread of Don Eusebio. The fear of this man has also enabled us to approach with success many of the large property-owners of sufficient age to be conservative. In other words, our movement is in full swing, and so far the Obregon party and Don Eusebio have no suspicion of

our plans. Carlos will tell you the situation among the Hualtecos."

Carlos stretched his long, thin hand on the table before him and tapped nervously with his fingers.

"As you know, gentlemen," he began, "since the last revolution, no traders from Aldaban ever visit the interior of the Hualtecos country. All business with my people is transacted with the Hualtecos living on this side of the Cordilleras, under the leadership of Estaban. Even the tax-collectors deal only with Estaban, who pays annually the contributions of the whole tribe.

"Last year Obregon called me to him and said he had decided to increase the taxes paid by my people. I urged him to refrain on the ground that the time was not yet ripe; but this year, as soon as we decided on our movement, I went to Obregon and told him that I thought the time had come to increase the taxes paid by the Hualtecos, and got him to appoint our friend Linares to go to my country to ascertain what increase was possible.

"You see, I killed two birds with one stone by this: I increased Obregon's confidence in me and got him at the same time to send Linares. Our friend has not wasted his time. He has sent the word far and wide among the Hualtecos that Obregon intends to raise their taxes enormously, and that this is the moment, if they wish to remain free men, to strike one great blow for their liberty. Once the news of the increased taxation got about, Linares had no difficulty in organizing the entire tribe on a war basis, and they are ready to march

on Aldaban the moment Everett and his five hundred Americans arrive."

Henriquez then took up his tale. He was in great good humor; but even his high spirits did not permit him to lay aside the pomposity of his manner.

"From our point of view everything goes well. With the exception of Germany, none of the foreign governments seems to be taking the slightest interest in our affairs. Schwartz is, as you know, very active, and backed by his Government. He has tied his fortunes to those of Don Eusebio, and we must realize that in fighting for our friend Estrada here, we are of necessity fighting the German Empire; but, with the aid of our American friends, that should not disturb us. I frankly depend upon the United States, and I know that, because of that, the future of Mescalita is safe. I feel sure that it is because of my attitude in this respect, and also because of my ability, that Don Emilio Estrada has chosen me to be the minister of public works in his cabinet. This will enable me to link closer than ever our relations to the United States."

Henriquez paused, struck an attitude, and filled his lungs with a long breath.

Harding saw that they were in for a pompous discourse, and he rose to his feet and politely said:

"My friend Henriquez, we all have the utmost confidence in you. Let's now get down to details."

Henriquez flushed and sat down as there came a rap on the door and Ben shouted:

"Don Eusebio and Schwartz are crossing the square,

heading in this direction. I thought I'd better let you know."

"Hell!" said Harding. "Delay them for a few minutes, Ben, and then let them in." To the three Mesca-lians, who seemed shaken with terror, and were looking at one another with suspicion in their eyes, he added, "Quick! Give me the contract!"

Without more ado he seized the compromising document and stuffed it into his pocket.

The instant Ben's voice was heard Ladbrook had seized the box of chips and, without trying to divide them equally, dumped a pile of different colored disks in front of each person and then, with the rapidity of a trained gambler, dealt out five cards to each man, and said in a low voice:

"It's your ante, Henriquez. We're playing for nothing, of course; but we'll say the blue chips are five hundred dollars each. That may explain the nervousness in our manner, gentlemen. Come on, ante and draw cards."

There was a rap at the door, and Harding, rising, thrust back the bolt and, as it opened, greeted Don Eusebio and Schwartz pleasantly.

"Hello, gentlemen! This is a real surprise. Ben, open a couple of bottles of champagne. Now, gentlemen, sit down while we play this hand out. I hope your presence here will bring me luck."

He resumed his place at the table. They were supposed to be playing a fifty-dollar jack-pot, and all had anted but he. So he flicked a yellow chip into the middle of the table and took up his hand. He glanced at

his cards and saw that he had two pairs, kings and sixes.

"How many cards, gentlemen?" asked Ladbrook.

"Uno," replied Henriquez.

"Yo tambien," said Carlos.

"Lo mismo," said Estrada.

"One for me also," said Harding.

"The dealer takes one," said Ladbrook.

"Well," said General Carlos, "our armies seem all equally strong, but they need the same little reinforcement."

Schwartz and Eusebio had filled their glasses with champagne and were watching the play eagerly. At Carlos's military simile, Schwartz grinned and said:

"What your armies need is artillery, I guess. Whichever of you draws the biggest gun will win the pot."

"Not so," said Carlos, quietly. "What we each want is a card to suit our hands, just as our artillery must suit the capacity of the army that has it, as well as the terrain."

Ladbrook broke in, his voice showing signs of irritation, and said quickly:

"Cut out this military rot, which is Greek to me, and let's get down to cases. Do you open, Henriquez?"

The latter grinned and said:

"I like Carlos's simile, for I have drawn a big gun, and it suits the terrain of my hand to a *t*. I bet the limit on it."

He threw in a blue chip worth fifty dollars; Carlos and Estrada did the same. It was Harding's turn. He had not yet picked up the card dealt him. When he

did so he found it was a king, thus giving him a full house, kings up:

"I'll raise you," he said, and threw in two blue chips. Ladbrook stayed with him. Henriquez again raised the limit, and all followed, till it came Ladbrook's turn, who raised another five hundred.

Henriquez was lovingly engaged in piling the fifteen blue chips one on the other. Not until he had done so successfully, and also had piled the five yellow chips, did he take up his hand, and, after looking at it for a seemingly long time, said:

"I see your five hundred dollars and raise you five hundred." Carefully he placed a blue chip on the pile at the middle of the table. Carlos, Estrada, and Harding stayed in.

When it came to Ladbrook, he threw in two blue chips, saying:

"It will cost you boys another five hundred to see what I have got."

Henriquez saw, and raised him. Estrada, Carlos, and Harding dropped out.

Ladbrook threw in two blue chips, thus seeing and raising his only opponent, who, suddenly seeming to lose courage and apparently dominated by the quiet confidence of the American gambler's demeanor, only called his bet, and then with an air of doubtful bravado threw four queens on the table.

Estrada, though he had quit, grunted and showed a full hand, jacks up. Harding threw down his hand, and not till then did Ladbrook announce and prove that he had four aces.

Eusebio turned to Schwartz and whispered so low as to be inaudible to the others:

"You see, the damned Yankees always win."

Henriquez's face was a study. He had evidently forgotten that they were not playing for real money, and kept muttering:

"Hellish luck! The first time I have held four of a kind in two months."

Ladbrook knocked down the tower of chips that Henriquez had so carefully built up, and with a careless gesture swept them all into his pile.

"Fill our glasses, Ben," said Harding. Turning to the visitors, he said with a smile: "Business is so bad in Mescalita that the only way we Americans can make a living is by playing poker."

Eusebio, who had emptied his glass, held it out to be refilled. Then looking at Schwartz, but addressing the others, he said:

"That's why we called upon you and interrupted your game. My friend Schwartz has an idea that may work out well and give you two Americans a chance of making some money." Then, throwing a quick, sly glance at his three compatriots, he added: "And I suppose it won't hurt you three gentlemen any, for you seem to be tied up to this bank."

The three Mescalians started at this; but, quickly controlling themselves, nodded their heads and looked inquiringly at Harding. None of this by-play had been unobserved by either Harding or Ladbrook, though the latter appeared to be lost in thought, and watched aim-

lessly the bubbles rise in his glass. Harding, however, turned sharply to Schwartz and said with a laugh:

"What's come over you? This is the first time that I have ever heard of your having a plan to make money for other people."

Schwartz coughed, and drew himself up:

"We Germans are no hogs and don't mind sharing profits a bit. 'Live and let live' is our motto."

"Now I know you're sick," said Harding, "for you talk like a psalm-singer. Your real motto is 'Die all men that I may profit.'"

Eusebio understood English perfectly, but pretended he did not. So he now broke in with a request that they speak Spanish and that an opportunity be given Schwartz to lay his plan before them. Harding nodded, and Schwartz began, speaking rapidly in Spanish:

"We take it for granted, Harding, that you had no luck in New York, for the bonds being unprinted, we don't think anybody with half a mind will advance any money on the certificates; and if our surmise is correct, your railroad venture is in a bad way, for we know you can't afford to finish it with the resources of your bank. You started work too quick. No sooner had you begun than President Obregon realized that it was manifestly unfair to the other business interests to give that railroad contract and the port works to one group. That's why the bonds have not been printed. Now they will be printed and placed in your hands if you give my firm a half interest in the enterprise. Of course I'll pay you one-half of what you have spent up to date as well. So, you see, I am perfectly fair. There is room

in this country for all of us, and what I wish is that we may work together in all friendship and divide all profits."

Don Eusebio nodded his head in approbation and said:

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think? You must admit that we are fair men."

"Schwartz," said Harding, quietly, "you've a wonderful command of Spanish. Explain to Don Eusebio the meaning of the word 'bushwhacker,' which is the mildest term I can apply to you two."

Schwartz grinned and said:

"Of course we are using a little force, but we Germans always think that force and fairness go together."

Ladbrook, who had not ceased to look at the bubbles in his glass, now kicked Harding gently under the table and whispered a few hurried words in his ear. Estrada and his companions were watching Harding narrowly and trying in vain to maintain a composed expression of countenance.

"There is no use, Schwartz," said Harding. "You simply can't butt into our game. You have not let us in on the artillery purchase, nor have we asked to share your profits in that matter. In future, perhaps, we can arrange affairs on a different basis, but now we have a contract with President Obregon's government, and we are carrying out our part of it. We have the right to hope and believe that the honor of Mescalita is safe in President Obregon's hands, and that he will play fair with us and give us those bonds. You are right in thinking that we have no backing as yet, but

we have not only some money in this bank, but patience also, and hope in President Obregon. We shall continue to work, and we feel sure that in a short time we shall get the bonds."

Then looking at Don Eusebio, he added:

"I know you don't like Americans, Eusebio. That is a personal matter with you, and maybe your feelings are reciprocated by us; but let me tell you one thing. When in the United States, I did not appeal to my Government for help in forcing your Government to act, which is what Schwartz would have done in a minute had he been in our situation. We Americans are really friends of Mescalita, and know that we are safe when we place full confidence in the honor and uprightness of your people. We don't drag our Government into our affairs. Therefore we are safe people for all Spanish-American countries to deal with. Whereas with Europeans, and in particular with Schwartz and the Germans, it is an entirely different matter. He takes no steps without consulting his Government, and we all know that hoggishness and intrigue underlie all German trading. I'll give you a tip, Eusebio: if the people of Mescalita knew that every time they do business with the Germans they are forging a fetter in the chain which will eventually bind them helpless to the wheels of German intrigue, they would rise as a man and kick Schwartz out of this country. We were established here before Schwartz came and we'll be here after he's gone."

At this remark Eusebio and Schwartz exchanged a quick glance in which amusement seemed blended with surprise and uncertainty.

Harding looked at them both for a moment and then, bringing his closed fist down on the table, said:

"That's our last word, gentlemen. We'll play out our own hand and play it alone."

And then, turning to the three Mescalians in front of him and without changing his tone, but winking rapidly with the eye away from Schwartz and Eusebio, he said:

"You gentlemen know that we don't play politics here, and the last thing that Ladbrook and I want is to drag you, our good friends, into any struggle in which we may be involved. We don't even ask you for an expression of opinion; but we are glad that you to-day have been witnesses of this combination of Eusebio and Schwartz against us."

The three men bowed and said nothing.

Eusebio jumped to his feet, his face flushed with anger. Schwartz rose with him.

Eusebio placed his hands on Schwartz's shoulder:

"This is my friend," said he, "and your insults to him have struck me to the heart. I don't play your damned card games, but I know this much, that Schwartz and I hold the winning hand in this business. You fellows can only bluff, as you call it. Come on, Schwartz!" And the two, with a brief sweeping nod of adieu, stamped out of the room.

Before the door shut behind them, Ladbrook's quiet, but clear voice was heard saying:

"It's your deal, Henriquez."

"See if those men are listening at the door, Ben," said Harding.

The bartender disappeared noiselessly, and in a moment returned.

"No," said he; "they're on their way across the square, jabbering, and waving their hands like a couple of macaques."

Estrada gave a sigh of relief.

"You played your hand well, Harding," said he. "Thank you for that little speech you made us three at the end. At first those men coming here gave me the jumps, but now I see why they came plainly enough, and their coming suits our plans. It's because Obregon has recovered his health, and they feel they have to play more carefully and not count simply on Eusebio's immediate rise to power."

"Now," said Harding, "these men are not coming back. So let's put away the cards and talk business. Everett will soon be in the Hualtecos country, and the German artillery is due to arrive in a few weeks. We've got to act before it comes. Three weeks from to-day is the national holiday. My plan is for all of us to make ourselves conspicuous on that day and leave Aldaban that night. Obregon will hold the review of the troops, and most of the army will be in Aldaban; but they must leave behind in their different barracks most of their ammunition and real war equipment. Until the holiday we must go about our business quietly and meet as rarely as possible, acting in such a fashion as to make people believe that nothing is farther from our mind than leaving Aldaban.

"For instance, I suggest that my friend, Ladbrook here, starts making the improvements in his house that

he has long had in mind. You, Henriquez, can amuse yourself by taking up the matter of the railroad contract with President Obregon, and act as if you thought it wise to play off the Americans against the Germans in that matter. You, Carlos, send a messenger at once to the Hualtecos to get news from Everett; and as you, as secretary of war, are in charge of the military review, arrange that the troops taking part in it are as poorly equipped as possible. You see, I am gambling on Everett's arrival in the near future, and I am sure I am right in doing so."

Turning to Estrada, he said:

"How does it strike you, chief?"

Estrada, flattered by the title, smiled, bowed, and said:

"I'm ready. I take it, Harding, that you mean us all to work quietly till the holiday; then make ourselves conspicuous at the review and even at the ball, which follows in the evening, and then mount our horses and ride to the Hualtecos, bearing in our hands the torches of war. But I shan't be idle until that day. I am spending money like water, and this sum of yours, added to what I have left, will go in the direction where it will do the most good."

Turning to Carlos, he said:

"I count on you to make use of the money I am giving you not only to make friends for us in this particular movement, but to lay the foundation for a faithful army when I shall become president. As you know, I intend to make Linares, your cousin, the minister of war." Then, drawing himself up proudly, he

added: "For I have no fear of the Hualtecos, as Obregon has. I shall treat them so well that I hope to make them the backbone of this country."

Ladbrook had spoken no word. He had not even raised his eyes from the table, where his hands had been busy nervously shuffling the cards. He now raised his head and said:

"We're gambling pretty heavily on Everett, it seems to me; but I suppose it is a safe bet. Even if he does not come on the minute, we can hold the pass in the Cordilleras with the Hualtecos; but what we have got to stop at any cost is the arrival of the German artillery."

Harding tapped him on the arm and said:

"These gentlemen have enough to do without looking after that. That's our business, Dick, and we'll fix it up with Ellison not only to hold up the guns, but to cut the cable at Cruz Chico as well."

CHAPTER XIV

AS in most tropical countries, work began early in Aldaban, and it was at eight o'clock in the morning of the Thursday following the meeting in the back room that Harding took a seat at his desk. His eyes fell instantly upon a cablegram placed before him. It was the one sent by Wallace that told of the disappearance of Mrs. Ladbroke and the probability of her having taken boat for Cruz Chico, and suggested that Mrs. Harding should be allowed to follow.

Ladbroke was absent, superintending the changes and improvements in his house. Harding's first thought was to send for him and show him the cable; but, upon reflection, he decided not to do so. The ship was due to arrive the next day at Cruz Chico. If Mrs. Ladbroke was on board, as seemed likely, the important point was to have her met on arrival and prevent her communicating with Don Eusebio.

Harding decided to send Ladbroke at once to the port to arrange with Ellison the method of preventing the German artillery from falling into Obregon's hands and cutting the cable. The arrival of a ship from the north was a great event in the little sea-port, and he knew that Ladbroke, if there, would be certain to take his place in the crowd of curious people always assem-

bled at the dock on the arrival of a ship. He would then meet his wife and escort her to Aldaban. The fact that Ladbroke's house was being dismantled would force his wife to put up at Harding's home. The servants there were not in the pay of Don Eusebio, and once she were established there, it would be an easy matter, he thought, to prevent all communications between her and her admirer. One thing he feared was that she might have cabled Don Eusebio of her arrival; but, on taking thought, he did not find this to be likely. At any rate, if this had happened, there was no better way of meeting this contingency than by having Ladbroke meet his wife on her arrival.

The train left for Cruz Chico at noon. He sent a message to Ladbroke to come at once, and then sent a cable to Wallace, telling him to send Mrs. Harding on by the next ship. He recognized that this was the only step to take, for he felt that only a woman could manage another woman in a situation like this. He regretted that his wife would have to be in Mescalita during the revolution, but he felt that not only could he take care of her, but that she herself was one of those capable women who would not only not be in his way, but might on occasion prove of great assistance to the enterprise. But even if she took the next boat, she could not arrive for another eight days, and this meant that he and Ladbroke would have to take turns in watching Mrs. Ladbroke until his wife's arrival. He sighed as he thought how marriage complicates matters in a life like his and his friend's.

Harding told Ladbroke nothing of the cable, but had

little difficulty in persuading him to go at once to Cruz Chico. Since Everett's departure they had taken turns in paying a weekly visit to the railroad work. So Ladbrook's absence on this occasion would arouse no comment at Aldaban.

It was several hours later that Ladbrook descended from the rickety little narrow-gage railway train on its arrival at Cruz Chico. He had wired Ellison to meet him, and with the latter walked to the headquarters of the construction work, situated in an old stone house facing the central square, or *plaza di armas*, as such squares are almost invariably called in Spanish-American countries. Facing the headquarters, on the other side of the square, were the barracks. There was one ragged sentry on duty at the gate, and against the wall, shaded from the setting sun, were groups of wretchedly dressed soldiers, playing cards, smoking, or sleeping on the ground.

Ellison unlocked the door of the office and they entered a large, cheerless room, filled with tables covered with blue-prints. There was no glass in the windows, which were protected by iron shutters. They now stood open, letting in a blaze of sunlight and a hot, humid breeze from off the sea.

Ellison looked little like a bookkeeper. Tall and powerful, in the early thirties, with big hands and feet, fierce blue eyes, a hard mouth, and a square chin, he looked more like a policeman, and one more adept in handling a heavy locust night-stick than either a pen or a pencil. He and the five other Americans engaged on the work had been Everett's associates in more than

one revolution. One had been a lawyer's clerk; another had worked in a drug-store; two had been draftsmen in an architect's office in New York, and Ellison and his particular friend Baker had spent their early youth in a broker's office. Ellison was their acknowledged leader, but they all followed Everett, and it was he who had brought them to Mescalita. The impending revolution brought them joy, for men of their temperament easily tired of directing the work of railroad construction.

As soon as Ellison had closed the door he lit a cigarette and said:

"Well, how's things in Aldaban?"

"All quiet," said Ladbroke. "What I want to know is, what's the scheme in regard to the artillery? And also I want to see you about cutting the cable here when you get orders."

"Well," drawled Ellison, "I haven't got any fixed plan yet, but I've been picking up a mixed lot of old guns to arm our Jamaica negroes. They're a husky lot, and we treat 'em well, and they'll follow our orders. Any time you give the word, we can capture the barracks in jig-time and then seize the German guns when they arrive. There's five hundred troops here, but no discipline, and as far as I can learn, though all have carbines, there's very little ammunition—only about three rounds to a man. But I don't think we'll have to fight. If we give a little money to the colonel and his officers, they'll be on our side. They're a worthless lot and haven't had any pay for several months. They manage to exist by looting the surrounding plantations

in a systematic manner. They call it requisitioning, and give receipts for what they take; but the farmers don't trust them, and are cursing out Obregon's government to a man. Say, that old chief hasn't a friend down here on the coast. You will have no trouble starting things at this end. Cutting the cable is easy. It's up to you, Ladbrook, as to which way you want the big job done, lick the soldiers and take the barracks or bribe the officers. Either way suits me and my boys."

"Well," said Ladbrook, "we'll look things over to-morrow morning before train-time. I'll spend this evening going over accounts, for to-morrow is pay-day. I've brought the stuff with me in my bag."

"All right," said Ellison. "You know, since Everett left, we have followed his instructions and are not pushing the work any too hard. I guess all my boys will come in to-night so's to be on hand to see the ship come in. That's our only sport here, and, besides, there's some material coming on the boat."

The sun had now set, and Ellison carefully closed the iron shutters.

"Never take a chance at getting a pot shot," said he, smiling. "That's a sucker's game." Lighting a lamp, he sat down and began to go over the accounts with Ladbrook.

Before they had really got to work, a hurried rapping was heard at the door.

"One of the boys, maybe," said Ellison, and went to open it.

He did so cautiously at first, and then swung it wide as he nodded to Ladbrook and announced:

"Colonel Robledo, in command here at Cruz Chico." Then he turned and shook his visitor warmly by the hand. "Walk in, Colonel. You know Mr. Ladbrook, I guess, one of the bosses of the railroad. Just come down from Aldaban."

Robledo, bowing, entered the room. While he was shaking hands with Ladbrook, Ellison brought him a chair, and all sat down. Robledo was a big man for a Mescalian, and looked every inch a soldier, as soldiers go in that country; and such he was by profession, for he had adopted the military career as a means of livelihood after having lost his several haciendas at play. His father, long since dead, had been a friend of Obregon's, and it was through this vague tie that Robledo had been given the post at Cruz Chico, where living was easy and pickings fairly plentiful. At the opening of the railroad work Everett had made him a considerable present, and every month he had received a fixed sum in exchange for not interfering in any way with the work. On the whole his relations with the Americans were good, though he was considered to be a somewhat expensive bore.

Knowing his character, Ladbrook was not surprised to see him, but he was somewhat amazed when the colonel said that he would like to speak with him alone.

"Go right ahead," said Ladbrook. "I've no secrets from Ellison, and I am sure you haven't. We're all friends here."

"No," said Robledo. "I must talk to you alone."

Ladbrook shrugged his shoulders, and asked Ellison to step out for a moment:

"Take a little walk in the square," said he, "and be back in five minutes. If that time is enough?" he said, glancing at the colonel.

"Oh, yes," said Robledo, smiling.

"Look out for a touch," said Ellison as, grinning, he went out and closed the door.

Robledo, taking a cigarette from Ladbrook and lighting it over the lamp, said in his best manner:

"I regret that I do not speak your beautiful language. What was it our friend said on leaving?"

Ladbrook gazed at him steadily and said:

"The last word was 'much.' The whole sentence was, 'I like this gentleman very much.'"

Robledo extended his arms, threw back his head, and rolling up his eyes, said:

"Ah, Mr. Ellison is a fine gentleman. I like him very much, too. I like all Americans." Then, dropping his manner, he leaned toward Ladbrook and whispered, "You know Muñoz?"

Muñoz was one of Carlos's best men in the war department. Ladbrook supposed that he was cognizant of the coming revolution, but did not know for certain; so he was on his guard.

"Yes, I know Muñoz," he replied.

"Well," said the colonel hurriedly, "he came down from Aldaban yesterday and is still here. He has big news. He's a good friend of mine, and I have much influence over him. He is coming to see you in a few moments, and I wanted to see you alone, so as to let you know that whatever he does for you is in obedience to my instructions." Then, tapping his chest, he con-

tinued: "Robledo is a fine man. He is your friend, the friend of your bank, the friend of your railroad. Don't forget him, and don't forget that what Muñoz does comes from me."

"Yes," Ladbrook repeated, "I know Muñoz. What about him?"

Robledo gave a hurried glance at the door and window, and lowered his voice until it was almost inaudible, saying:

"I know of the grand movement for liberty, equality, prosperity." He lingered over those three magic words and gave them their full value. "This movement cannot have success unless the grand Robledo is in it. Muñoz wants me to join. I told him I would think it over, and would not join unless my great friends the railroad people wish me to do so. They are the people who can give liberty, equality, and prosperity to this country. They have the money. If they say they will give it, they will keep their word. I love the Americans."

Ladbrook waved his hand.

"I don't know what movement you're talking about, Robledo; but if Muñoz wants you to join some movement, he will undoubtedly be generous toward you in exchange for your support."

"Yes, yes," said Robledo; "but not enough for the grand service I can give. And, besides," he added, with a shrewd look, "this is work for the Americans, and I want American money, too. How much would you give me?"

Ladbrook yawned and said:

"That depends on what you do, Robledo. I don't quite get you; but you can be sure, if you do a good job, you'll get paid."

While Ladbrook was speaking, Robledo had been listening intently, and he rose to his feet as Ladbrook spoke the last words.

"I think I hear Muñoz coming now. Don't tell him a word of what I said, but I count on you as an American *caballero* to pay me well."

At that moment came a rap at the door, this time hard and authoritative.

"Come in!" said Ladbrook.

Muñoz entered, looking annoyed as he caught sight of Robledo. The latter smiled and bowed, and said pompously:

"I have just stepped in to greet my great friend Mr. Ladbrook, and will not stay to interrupt your valuable talk."

Ladbrook accompanied him to the door and shut it after him. Muñoz laughed.

"I can guess what Robledo has been in for. What a contempt you must have, Ladbrook, for some of my people! Thank God! we're not all like Robledo, and you know we are not."

Muñoz was a clean-looking, frank-mannered little man, and Ladbrook, though he knew him slightly, hoped rather than felt that he could trust him. So he smiled and said:

"It takes all kinds of people to make a world, Muñoz; so I suppose that some time Robledo will have his place in the scheme of things and have to be counted on. I

may say that you are right in your supposition. He came, as usual, to get money. He now claims to control you."

"Let him claim," said Muñoz. "You know it is not the case, and you know also under whose orders I am working." Then he added in a lowered voice, "General Carlos."

"All right," said Ladbrook.

"The general did not know you were coming here," said Muñoz, "or doubtless he would have told you about my visit. He told me, when I finished my work, to report to Ellison; but now that you are here, I'll tell you what I have done.

"Ever since yesterday I've been in conference with Robledo and the more intelligent of his officers. I have distributed money with a free hand, and have made them large promises if they remain loyal to and obey strictly the orders of Ellison or whatever American may be in charge here. We think it's better that way than to have to fight Robledo and his men. They are dazzled by the money and promises, and have turned their eyes away from Obregon, whom they blame for the miserable pay they receive. The only difficulty now will be to curb their impetuosity until we need them, and when we do need them to grab the German cannon, to see that they do not go too far and murder in cold blood every man of the German gun-crew. The rascals are full of enthusiasm. Here comes Ellison now," he added as a knock on the door was heard.

"Come in!" shouted Ladbrook. And in came Ellison, with Robledo's smiling face behind him.

"Now," said Ladbrook, turning to Muñoz, "explain to Robledo that he must take orders from Ellison."

Robledo was in high spirits, and assented to everything that Muñoz said. When the latter had finished, Ladbrook added his word:

"Now, Robledo, no nonsense or boasting is wanted from you. Muñoz says you have accepted his instructions, and those are that you are to take orders from Ellison, who gets orders from me. Obey orders, and you'll be well treated. I won't go back on what I said to you."

Robledo evidently did not like Ladbrook's frankness, but, nevertheless, took it in good part when he heard his last words. The two Mescalians then rose, shook hands, and went out into the darkness.

At ten o'clock the next morning all the chivalry and wealth of Cruz Chico, such as it was, had gathered at the wharf to wait the coming of the steamer. Lolling on bales of goods and between vast piles of green bananas, or stretched at ease on the planking, were numbers of stevedores and idlers. All the Americans from the railroad had turned up.

As the ship appeared in view near at hand, turning a bend in the river, the whistle blew continuously. The fluttering of a veil on the bridge caught all eyes.

It was not until the ship was almost at the dock that Ladbrook, with a start, recognized his wife as the wearer of the veil.

The hawsers were quickly thrown ashore, and the gang-plank thrown down. It was steep, and all Mrs. Ladbrook's attention was required in negotiating the

descent. So she started, turned pale, and then flushed red when her husband grasped her by the arm and kissed her on the cheek.

"Why, Dick!" was all she could say, and nearly fell into his arms.

"Where's Violet?" said Dick.

"She did not come," said Margaret, almost inaudibly.

"Well, cheer up," said Dick, somewhat roughly. "Everybody is looking at you. You can tell me your story on the train. Just talk to Ellison for a minute while I say a word to the captain."

Margaret looked at him imploringly, and then turned to greet Ellison.

Ladbrook's business with the captain was soon over, and he called Margaret to identify her luggage. He smiled grimly as she pointed not only to the large trunk she had taken with her, but to two others, brand-new and of greater size.

The sun was blazing hot; but Margaret, who was talking nervously to Ellison and the other Americans, seemed to forget her parasol till reminded of it by Ladbrook, who said:

"Come along, my dear. It will be cooler in the hotel, and we'll have just time to eat a bite before the train leaves."

Margaret seemed in a trance and stumbled several times in crossing the rough planking of the dock. She was pale and obviously troubled. Ladbrook's usual calm had returned to him, and while steadying her with his hand under her arm, he continued to chat with Ellison, who accompanied them. At luncheon Margaret

ate but little, and was noticeably silent. When the coffee came, she pleaded a bad headache, and asked Ladbroke to give her a pony of brandy.

"Surely," he said somewhat grimly. "Two if you like."

A few minutes afterward they were seated side by side in the little railway-carriage, and the train started on its way.

"Now, Margaret," said Ladbroke, "take your time and tell me what happened. Tell it in your own way. We've got several hours before us."

She turned to her husband and grasped his arm:

"Oh, Dick, I could not stand it up North, away from you. Violet is not really ill; I'm sure of that. Yet I could see she was planning to stay a long time away from Mescalita. I thought we were coming back with Wesley; but instead of that, we went up to the Adirondacks. Violet is always a dear, yet I could not stay away from you. I felt there was something in the wind, and I must be by your side."

Ladbroke said nothing at first; but when Margaret continued to be silent, he asked:

"Is that all you have to say?"

"Is not that enough?" she said, flushing and bridling up with a certain pugnacity.

"No," replied Ladbroke, "it is not. What you say is not reason enough for your sudden and unannounced return."

Margaret caught her throat as if to check a sob and said:

"I wanted to give you a surprise. I hoped to walk

into the bank at Aldaban this evening and make you happy by my return."

Ladbrook looked at her coldly.

"I won't ask you any more questions, Margaret; but I want you, of your own accord and in your own way, to lay the cards on the table and tell your real story. You'll find that's the best in the end."

Margaret took out her handkerchief and dabbed her eyes with it.

Oh, Dick, I am so tired and upset by this journey Don't tease me! Let me rest a little!" She added after a pause, "I think you are mean not to believe what I say."

Ladbrook was tempted to talk frankly with his wife and tell her what he knew; but he checked himself with the thought that if she was already untrue to him in her heart, this would do no good, and might precipitate matters with Don Eusebio, and thus menace the whole success of their great enterprise. Yet in his rough way he was sorry for her, but his pride made it hard for him to let her think that she could deceive him.

They rolled on in silence for more than an hour, with heads averted, gazing through the windows at the slowly moving panorama of tropical scenery. Ladbrook's mind was busy. Though Margaret remained silent, he noticed that she was looking at him from time to time from under her eye-lashes in that sly feminine fashion so maddening to many men. She had stopped crying and was somewhat less pale, but her lips were closely pressed together, and her face had assumed an obstinate, almost fatalistic expression.

Ladbrook decided to give her one more chance, and, turning to her, said as kindly as he could:

"Now, my dear, tell me what's on your mind."

Margaret remained silent. Without returning his glance, but looking straight ahead of her, with her little chin stuck out defiantly, she appeared sulky, obstinate, and determined not to speak.

Her silence infuriated her husband. He was tempted to shake her, but controlled himself. So he only sighed, and turned again toward the window.

As they were nearing Aldaban, he turned suddenly to her and said quietly:

"I must tell you that we shall live at the Hardings'. Our house is in the hands of the builders. You see, your return is quite unexpected."

The looks of surprise, chagrin, and almost fear that chased one another across Margaret's face at his words confirmed his worst suspicions.

Harding met them at the station and greeted his friend's wife with well-feigned surprise, though he said to himself:

"We've got our hands on the little devil, but can we hold her till Violet comes?"

CHAPTER XV

THROUGHOUT the drive to the house Margaret continued her sulks, pleading fatigue, and answering by monosyllables the few questions put to her by Harding. Both men noticed, however, that her eyes were busy and that she kept casting surreptitious glances in all directions, as if in search of some one.

Margaret passed a night of torment. Despite the fact that she had returned with her mind made up to throw herself in the arms of Eusebio and share with him his dreams of power, wealth, and finally a life of luxury in Paris, the appearance of her husband at Cruz Chico had somehow weakened her purpose. Notwithstanding the unpleasant shock of their sudden meeting, his matter-of-course kiss, his authoritative manner, and his very roughness all tended to remind her of the days when he had first won her love. On the train she had been sorely tempted to yield and tell the whole story and perhaps, had he shown a little warmth or tenderness, she would have done so. She wondered why she had not, and felt rather proud that she had resisted the temptation. He was the same, but she herself was the one who had changed, and she knew why: she wanted more affection than her husband was apparently either

willing or able to give her. She had not been aware of this lack of warmth in him until her meeting with Don Eusebio, whose ardent wooing and extravagant promises had carried her off her feet. She felt like a goldfish that had escaped from its tranquil aquarium and plunged into some sun-dazzled and ever-changing stream. It was not too late to return to the comfortable and protecting bowl, but the lure of rapid water was strong. The thought of Eusebio excited her.

She felt that she had given her word to her admirer; that perhaps he counted upon her as an inspiration; that she was necessary to his life; that without her he might fail in his dreams. Ladbroke, she felt, no longer needed her, and she was one of those women who give their love freely only when they feel that it is needed.

When morning came, she decided to meet Eusebio during the day, cost what it may; and when the men had left, she wrote a note and gave it to one of the native maids with a present, an exhortation to secrecy, and a threat. This done, she dressed, and descended to the garden, where she was surprised to see Ben.

He rose from his bench and, approaching her respectfully, said:

"I hope you are better, Madam."

He spoke so seriously that she was startled.

"Why, I feel perfectly well. Who told you I was ill?"

Ben stammered and replied:

"Why, Mr. Harding said so."

"He must be dreaming. I've never been better in my life."

Now, Ben had always admired Mrs. Ladbrook, and this admiration shone from his eyes as he said:

"You sure look fine. I'm the sick one, I guess. The fact is, I ain't been feeling any too well lately. Guess I had a touch of the sun, and Mr. Harding has let me spend the day here in the cool."

"All right, Ben. Make yourself comfortable, and if you want anything, just clap your hands."

Margaret returned to the house. She had hardly done so when the maid brought the answer from Don Eusebio. It was a request for her to meet him at once in a deserted garden only a short distance up the street, in the rear of Harding's house.

She seized her hat and parasol, and made her way through the stable-yard to the street. As she hastened to the rendezvous, her pulse beat high. She touched her hand to her hair, wondered if her hat was becoming. How stupid she had been not to put on one of the new frocks she had bought in New York!

Through a broken gate she entered the deserted garden, a mere tangle of palm-trees and writhing vines. There was an open place to the left of the entrance, and there stood Eusebio.

He had heard her coming, and had thrown himself into a dramatic pose, his arms outstretched, his head thrown back a little and to one side; the wrinkles under his eyes betrayed what he meant to be an entrancing smile, hidden in reality by his large mustache. His gold-decked hat lay on the ground beside him. Little did he know the mysteries of a woman's heart and the brisk changes of which it is capable. His pose, which

he had chosen with care; his costume, which he considered irresistible; his enormous mustache, and his bullet-head seemed to act as a check rather than a lure to the lady. He felt her hesitation, but was unwilling to change his pose, which, he was sure, was the correct one, for he remembered that it was with it that he had first seemed to win her heart.

Margaret had unmistakably put the brakes on. Her pace slowed. With her eyes fixed upon his bullet-head, she said in a nervous voice:

"Put on your hat, my friend."

Her little visit to New York had done her good. Like a flash she remembered that she had seen a man startlingly like this one playing a hand-organ, with a red-coated monkey on his shoulder. In front of him had passed a throng of strong white men.

Her Anglo-Saxon blood chilled the warmth of her heart. Practical common sense, as great a safeguard as modesty to the soul of a woman, came to her aid. She felt that if he did not change his pose and speak, she must turn and flee; but he did, and for a moment the disagreeable spell was broken. With a slight bending of his waist and a graceful gesture he picked up his hat and placed it on his head, saying as he did so:

"At last, my heart!"

His grace, his stalwart frame, and the music of his voice, all aided in chasing from her mind the vision of the New York street, and once more she felt herself falling under his spell; but when he tried to take her in his arms, she stepped back and said;

"Speak, Eusebio! speak!"

Like a piano struck by the hand of a master, Eusebio, instinctively grasping what was needed, poured forth in his musical voice a very symphony of love and adulation.

Margaret's bosom swelled. This was indeed her Eusebio. This feeling grew as the man showed surprising tact and made no motion to renew his effort to take her in his arms.

"You see, I have come," murmured Margaret. "We only have a few moments, and I am tired and nervous after my journey." Then after a pause: "Have you missed me?"

His deep-throated love song began instantly, but she checked him:

"I felt you needed me," she said; "that perhaps you were in danger, and that without me your plans might fail."

In her heart she had never been very sure what the details of those plans were. They had seemed to her as a vast canvas on which war, glory, wealth, luxury, and love were splashed in glaring colors.

"Of course I needed you," said Eusebio, earnestly. "I need you every hour. My plans are always the same; but they are delayed, that's all. You remember I was to succeed Qbregon, my brother-in-law, as president, seizing the power as it fell from his dying hand; but by a miracle he seems to have recovered all his strength. I cannot murder him. I hope this flash of health is but momentary, a last flare of a dying ember."

Margaret's eyes opened wide.

"I do not understand. You mean you do not wish me to fly with you?"

"Yes, yes, of course. The minute Obregon dies and I succeed him, I take you for my own."

Margaret's eyes became cold as he continued:

"We must have patience. It cannot be for long. I am yours forever, and you know it. With you by my side, Paris will lie like a slave at our feet. Think of it, my love. Is it not worth a little patience?"

Carried on by his eloquence, his better judgment became dim, and he added:

"Obregon, when well, is a dangerous man, and jealous of his power. I have a vast scheme on hand with Schwartz, the German banker, and I must do nothing to irritate the president. If I ran away with you, it would make a scandal and hurt my business. Obregon would hate me, and lean toward Estrada and the damned Americans, and all my plans would be ruined."

Margaret said quietly:

"You men are all alike. You put business and the success of your miserable plans ahead of love."

"No," he protested. "Our happiness is at stake, yours as well as mine. I hate caution, but we must make use of it."

His voice still held its charm, but his words had lost their power. It was only when singing of love that he touched her heart. Absolute, undying, reckless love, that was what she felt her soul cried out for, what she expected of him. His show of caution, his mention of business, his reference to Schwartz, for whom she had

a marked dislike, struck a false note in the symphony and definitely marred its effect. She turned to go.

"Ah, no," he said, "do not leave me!" And then, making use of all his seduction of voice and manner, he added: "The time of waiting need not be one of sorrow. You can live on quietly as before in the eyes of the world; but you could be mine, really mine, long before I am free to act openly. We are alone. Ah, my adored one!"

Like a flash Margaret came to her senses. The man was, after all, a brute. She had been willing to sever all ties and fly with him, but to yield to his desires and lead a double life of secrecy and intrigue revolted her.

"Never!" she said. "How dare you?"

Eusebio looked at her, his expression changing from surprise to anger. He did not speak.

The revulsion in Margaret's sentiment struck her like a blow. For a moment she closed her eyes and swayed on her feet. In that instant of time there flashed upon her vision the face of her husband, handsome, somewhat bitter, cold, and calm, and her soul turned toward it almost in prayer. She opened her eyes, but the picture of her husband remained before her and seemed to call her to immediate action. The past was swept away; her duty stood clear. She must stay by her husband's side, win back his love, and aid him in his fight. She caught her breath, and a faint smile crossed her pale face.

"My friend, you shock me. I am not that kind of woman."

Eusebio made a gesture of impatience, and then murmured a lame excuse.

"No two women are alike," he said, "but you are always my queen."

It was now he who seemed anxious to end the interview; but she, with her sudden change of feeling, wished to prolong it.

"Stay," she said. Her smile became winning, and she touched him on the arm: "I am a lonely woman. I have nothing to fill my life. Tell me your plans. Perhaps I can aid you."

The touch of her arm electrified him, and her words awoke in his mind the real idea that dominated his thoughts. Without hesitation, he poured out in detail all he had done and intended to do. He was the friend of Schwartz, and his fortunes were linked with the German bank. It was he who had prevented the printing of the bonds for the Americans in order to bring about the failure of the American bank. The whole strength of Mescalita was to be thrown behind Schwartz and himself in their joint enterprises.

As she listened, Margaret realized Eusebio's hatred of her husband, and the thought came to her that now she might serve Ladbroke and win back his love by exposing Eusebio's plans. So she questioned him, and extracted from him the whole scheme. She then sighed and said:

"My friend, I am tired to-day. To-morrow I must rest, but please meet me here the day after."

With this understanding they separated. Margaret hurried home, her thoughts a tumultuous cloud through

which, like a golden star, shone the determination to win back her husband's love.

She went to her room, bathed her forehead, and did all she could to render herself composed and attractive against the meeting with Ladbrook. Her new dresses had been unpacked, and from among them she chose the one that seemed the most becoming. She seated herself on the veranda, which gave her a clear view of the entrance to the garden. Ben was still there, seated on a bench, reading.

She heard voices, and presently the door opened, and in came Harding and her husband. She noticed with surprise that both were smoking cigarettes. Her husband rarely smoked, but when he did, it was a cigar. At the sight she flushed with pleasure and excitement, and, leaving the veranda, ran to her room and got the beautifully jeweled cigarette-case that she had bought for Don Eusebio, saying to herself joyfully and with truly feminine superstition: "This is fate. I shall win back his love."

On her way to the veranda she stopped a moment. The sound of the men's voices reached her clearly, though she could not catch the words. Their tones were full of suppressed excitement and pleasure. What could have happened? Never before had she heard her husband's voice so animated. She stopped in astonishment, and then, saying to herself: "This is the moment. He is for once really happy. I shall win," ran impulsively to the veranda.

The men stopped speaking. She saw their faces were flushed, their eyes were bright, and without pausing an

instant, she threw her arms about her husband's neck, kissed him, drew back, and said:

"Dick, see what I have brought you. I knew you were going to smoke cigarettes."

A look of surprise and pleasure crossed Ladbroke's face, but before he could speak, she said, speaking rapidly:

"Dick, forgive me for my crossness. I will tell you all, everything. You will forgive me. You must, for I love you. I have much to tell you. I can help you. We can be happy at last."

She stopped, her hands clasped on her bosom and her eyes looking appealingly into those of Ladbroke.

His face was a study. He looked at Harding, then at his wife, and, putting his hand gently upon her shoulder, said:

"Margaret dear, you are excited and tired. I am glad you are going to be frank at last, but do not upset yourself. Let us have our lunch quietly, and we can have our talk in the afternoon, when you are more yourself."

"No, no," said Margaret; "I must tell you at once." Then, turning to Wesley: "Stay here. We shan't be long." She took her husband by the arm and led him into the sitting-room.

Harding threw himself into a chair and muttered to himself, "What's the game now?"

A low murmur of voices came from the sitting-room, and after a while Ladbroke called, with a happy ring in his voice:

"Come on, Wesley! Let's have lunch."

The meal passed pleasantly, and when they had finished, Ladbrook, turning to Margaret, said:

"Now, my dear, tell Wesley all that you know about Schwartz's scheme."

Margaret flushed, and then, in a quiet, circumstantial way, she told the tale of the German plot against the Americans, leaving out no detail which referred to it and mentioning Eusebio's name without emotion.

When she had finished, Ladbrook turned to Harding.

"The past is dead," he said; "Margaret has promised never to see that man again."

Margaret shuddered and said emphatically:

"Never!"

"Now, Wesley," began Ladbrook, "this is indeed a lucky day. Margaret has been frank at last, thank God! Let us be frank with her. Her information is worth a lot. Let's reward her by telling her the good news. She's got to know it some time. So, why not now? I think things would have been better if you and I had been more open with the women and told them all our plans."

Harding did not conceal his surprise. Could this be Ladbrook speaking, his eyes shining and his voice almost trembling with enthusiasm? So Harding said:

"All right, Dick. Fire away!"

In a few words Ladbrook explained to Margaret that they had that morning received word from Everett, who was on his way with a large army to sweep Obregon and their enemies from power and to make a government friendly to the Americans.

"You see," he said, "we had a reason for sending

you and Violet to New York. Now, Margaret, you've got something to think about and to keep your mind busy; so you won't be bored. Come on, Wesley. Let's get to work."

On passing through the garden, Harding tapped Ben on the shoulder and said:

"Run along to the bank and get things ready. Put champagne on ice. We're going to celebrate."

Indeed, the meeting in the back room of the bank that Saturday afternoon was a real celebration. The enthusiasm of the three Mescalians burned high, and again and again the Americans were forced to urge them to speak lower and control their joy. Not until half a dozen bottles of champagne had run dry did Harding assume charge of affairs and make them settle down to work.

The good news was from Linares, announcing the arrival of Everett and his men at Talco. It was dated eight days back, and said that, if all went well, the Americans would be at the pass in the Cordilleras in three weeks. This date suited well the revolutionary plans, for it meant that they would be ready to act before the national holiday, the day they had set for their flight from Aldaban. The plans for this flight must now be made. After discussion, Harding's idea was accepted. He had fifteen horses in his stable, all in good condition. The party would take part in the festivities of the national holiday and even attend the ball. They would leave at midnight, go to Harding's house, mount, and ride toward the pass of the Cordilleras.

It happened that Don Carlos's wife was an invalid, and living at his hacienda many miles from Aldaban. Estrada was a widower, and therefore Mrs. Henriquez would be the only woman besides the two Americans to be provided for. Happily she was one of those rare products of the tropics, a woman full of energy and at home on horseback.

"We've got fourteen days to wait," said Harding. "The main thing is to keep our faces fixed and act naturally up to the last moment. How many troops, Don Carlos, has the president ordered to take part in the review?"

Carlos pulled out a paper from his pocket.

"Nearly all the infantry, virtually all the artillery, and the entire force of *Rurales*, twenty-five hundred strong. I can see Eusebio's and Schwartz's hand in this. They want to let the president see in what bad shape the army is, and then urge upon him its entire reorganization on a modern basis, of course giving all the contracts, even for uniforms, to the Germans. Of course this means that we shall have to fight virtually the entire Mescalán army; but I don't mind that. It means one great pitched battle, which we are sure to win, and then the struggle will be over once and for all. Happily, the army is in very bad shape, and in giving orders for the review, I am laying particular stress on its making a good appearance, but that it is unnecessary to bring much ammunition either for their carbines or artillery. There is a fair supply of reserve ammunition for all arms here in Aldaban; so they will have enough to put up a good fight with. But ammuni-

tion is not all they will need; the fighting spirit will be absent. Most of the leading officers have come to our side. Only a few pet regiments, principally artillery, and Eusebio's *Rurales* will be completely loyal to Obregon. These I have not approached.

"I have arranged that Robledo and his troops remain at Cruz Chico to receive the German guns. Schwartz told me this morning that on Monday, day after tomorrow, Congress will pass a bill authorizing the Government to utilize the money raised for your railroad for the payment of Krupp. He has cabled this news, and says the guns will be shipped at once, and should reach Cruz Chico in time to be sent to Aldaban and take part in the review. We've got to stop this at any cost."

Ladbrook broke in:

"All right, Carlos. Send the word to Robledo, and let the matter rest there, please. We Americans will attend to the German artillery, of course with Robledo's help."

"Now," said Harding, "I want you, Estrada and Henriquez, to take part in the debate on Monday. After Eusebio has made his motion that the money voted for our railroad be given to Krupp for his guns, I want you to get up and point out quietly the irregularity of this course; that this money was voted for our work, which is being carried out on the strength of that vote. Say that the Americans showed confidence in the Government of Mescalita, and while it is unlikely that their Government will interfere in their behalf and the Americans can perhaps be ruined without risk, but how about the honor of Mescalita?"

"Then in a quiet way finish your talk by saying that, of course, if the great President Obregon wishes this to be done, you will be the first to agree. Then let Henriquez follow you, and continue to praise Obregon, and state that the honor of Mescalita is surely safe in the hands of that great patriot, the point being that both you gentlemen shall drop into the minds of the Congress the idea that it is Obregon, and Obregon alone, who is treating the Americans unfairly and giving his support to the Germans. At the same time both of you must show yourselves loyal to your chief.

"As a matter of fact, I know that you Mescalians do not in your hearts like any gringos; but I think I am safe in saying that, first and last, we Americans have more friends here than the Germans. The result of your speeches will be to show Congress that Obregon is not anti-gringo, and therefore a pure patriot, but simply anti-American. I want you, my friends, to do this. You will run no risk in doing so, and you will strengthen your own hands against the time when you come into power."

Both Estrada and Henriquez agreed.

Carlos, who appeared to take little interest in the foregoing conversation, demanded attention.

"My news from the Hualtecos is most satisfactory. All preparations have been made, and twenty thousand men, infantry and cavalry, are ready to move the moment Everett arrives and I give the word. This being the case, I think it is unwise for us to run the risk of communicating with the Hualtecos until the last moment. We have been lucky so far in our messengers,

but it is better not to run any risk. I have confidence in Estaban and the other chiefs, but I think a little mystery will do them good at this time. I know my people."

"All right," said Harding, "it's agreed then that we'll send no further word till the last moment. Our silence may mystify Everett, but he is a man of cool judgment and will not be disturbed by it.

"Now, gentlemen, our plans are made. The die is cast. Let us drink one last silent toast to victory!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE next boat from New York brought Violet Harding. Her husband and Mrs. Ladbrook met her at the dock. Harding wisely left them much alone on the journey to Aldaban, so that the women had ample opportunity to exchange confidences. Margaret became very expansive, admitted that she had gone pretty far with Don Eusebio and excused herself by saying that she felt her husband had ceased to love her. Now all was changed for the better. She thought that her absence in New York had done them both good. She now knew that she had always loved him. His manner had changed, and he had become more affectionate.

Violet, of course, already knew about the revolution, but feigned surprise and showed real enthusiasm when Margaret spoke of it. She said to herself that the revolution came at the nick of time to keep Margaret in the straight path, and she emphasized the value of the two wives becoming the leaders in the movement. This idea delighted Margaret. It gave her a feeling of importance. Her fancy for Don Eusebio had now disappeared and her loyalty to her husband grew in like measure. Indeed, she almost forgot that she had ever doubted his love.

Three days before the national holiday the roads leading to Aldaban were thronged with people. Military of all arms in their best uniforms; many of the richer landowners, the ladies and more aged men in old-fashioned open landaus, escorted by the sons of the house and a large body of retainers on horseback, all wearing heavily spangled native costumes; the poorer proprietors walking on foot, with their belongings tied to the back of a donkey, from morning till night thronged the dusty highways. The population of the city was almost doubled. Markets were established at every open place. The *pulperias* did an enormous trade. Oceans of pulque and the more fiery mescal were poured down thirsty throats. Drunkenness was epidemic, but the police were lenient, and few arrests were made.

It was indeed a holiday in the truest sense of the word, according to the lights of these half-civilized people. Their ideal of happiness was attained in drunkenness, idleness, music, and dancing.

The night before the great day a performance was given at the Teatro Nacional by a wandering French company. Neither Obregon nor his wife were present, but the seats and boxes were filled with his ministers, generals, and all the wealth and fashion of the country. The performance, though little understood by the audience, passed off well, until at the end a sinister incident cast a gloom over the entire assembly.

On the drop-curtain was painted an enormous picture of President Obregon in full regimentals. When this curtain fell at the close of the play, it split from top to bottom, tearing the effigy of the president in half.

The superstition lying near to the surface of the Spanish-American flashed from their eyes and became audible in murmurs. Many were the glances cast on Don Eusebio, sitting proudly in the president's box. His face was like a mask.

Estrada seized the occasion for a demonstration of loyalty, and shouting to the audience to wait, he harangued them, saying that the picture was a poor one, anyway; that it was symbolical of the illness through which their beloved president had just passed, and that they would paint a new and a better one at once to hang in its place, which would be an augury of long life for their beloved leader and prosperity for the whole country. There was some applause and cheering, but one could see that the accident had left a feeling of uncertainty and foreboding in the hearts of many.

It was a custom for the president to hold a reception in his palace on the morning of the national holiday. This reception was attended by all foreign representatives and by any one of the least prominence in the community. It took place in a long room, where the light was doubled by great gilt-framed mirrors opposite each of the large windows. At the end was a raised dais where the president took his stand and shook by the hand every one of the visitors as they passed slowly before him. But to-day Obregon did not appear. He sent word that he wished to reserve his strength for the great military review to be held at eleven o'clock.

His absence was taken as another ill omen. People looked worried, exchanged nervous glances, and spoke

in whispers. This state of mind was accentuated when it was seen that Don Eusebio had been chosen to act in Obregon's place, and it was not calmed by the short speech he made on taking his position on the dais. He said :

"Our beloved president wishes me to excuse him to you for his absence. He is not yet perfectly well. He wishes to guard his health for the review. It is understood that my appearance here as his representative is in no way political. Politically, President Obregon is represented by his ministers who surround me here. It is only as a member of his immediate family that I take his place."

The faces of Estrada, Henriquez, and Carlos were without expression. They stood like wax figures, their hands clasped in front of them, and their eyes turned to the ceiling.

Some of Eusebio's particular friends so far forget themselves as to cheer him. This was opposed by cheers given for the ministers. Then again it was Estrada who stepped forth and in a loud voice called for cheers and triple cheers for Obregon. They were given with a will, but it was an uneasy, troubled crowd which surged out of the palace doors and made their way to the review-ground.

The Americans had been prepared to attend the reception, but hearing in time of Obregon's absence, they did not go, thus avoiding the necessity of claspng Eusebio's hand. He noticed their absence.

The review was held in a large, dusty plain on the outskirts of the city. A small, roofed, wooden stand

had been erected for the use of Obregon and a few notables. The rest of the spectators, kept in line by troops and police, bore the blazing sun as best they could. Shortly before eleven o'clock Obregon arrived upon the scene. He came in a state carriage preceded by a regiment of cavalry, which was followed by a band of music. With him sat Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez. Then came carriages filled with notables.

Obregon took his place in the center of the stand, surrounded by his ministers. He was clad in full uniform, and looked to be almost in robust health. He stood very straight, his shoulders thrown back, his hands resting upon the hilt of a long sword. The iron cast of his dark countenance was striking. He moved his head from side to side in a quick, jerky fashion as his small, black eyes shot forth glances in every direction. His arrival took place amid a deep silence, and it was not until the band had ceased playing the national anthem that the people gave vent to their enthusiasm. Cheer upon cheer for Obregon rose in the air.

Obregon made no sign. The cheers gradually died away. Then he motioned to the band, which struck up a march, the signal for the review to begin.

First came the cavalry, then the artillery, then the infantry, and finally Don Eusebio with his *Rurales*. The last made the best display. They were well mounted, and their leader had furnished them at his own expense with new native costumes brightened with silver braid and buttons. Their sabers flashed in the air as they galloped by in clouds of dust. A keen observer would have noticed that the swords of the *Rurales* were

not the only things that gleamed amid the dust cloud. Don Carlos's orders had been carried out, and the carbine-barrels of the infantry had been burnished till they looked like lines of leaping flame. The field-pieces, too, shone like meteors.

The review ended, but there was another function to take place, and to witness this the crowd, released by the police, gathered round the stand. The band struck up a weird popular air as there lined up in front of Obregon twenty or thirty aged men, clad in tattered uniforms of a bygone day, their breasts covered with cheap medals. They were the last survivors of the band that had followed Obregon in his earliest struggle for power. As the music ceased, the mask fell from Obregon's face, and a grim smile lighted it. He called the veterans to him by name, and, after clasping their hands, gave each one a little ornamental bag heavy with money. This done, the veterans returned to their places, and with the eldest acting as leader, they broke into a quivering cheer for their old chief. This over the crowd cheered over and over again. Obregon, his manner now wholly changed, raised his hat and bowed graciously to the people. The review was over.

After luncheon and the inevitable siesta, the streets sprang to life as if by magic, and laughter and music filled the air. The upper classes kept their houses, however, reserving their strength for the presidential ball, the greatest social event of the year in Aldaban, which began at ten o'clock.

At nine o'clock there was a hurried meeting of the conspirators in Harding's house. The native servants

had been given their entire freedom until the next day.

When they had assembled, Harding spoke:

"The review passed off well, didn't it? Old Obregon is, if anything, too fit. You gave that doctor too much money, Don Emilio. He'll put up a good fight, and is popular still. There is no doubt about that."

"Not so much as you think," said Carlos. "Our people love to make a noise. Those cheers meant little. Wait till the people wake up to-morrow and find our *pronunciamientos* scattered broadcast. They will have a great effect. The people are really discontented and uneasy. That game of splitting the theater curtain has worked well. The story has spread like wildfire, and the people are sure that Obregon is doomed. That was my idea, you know."

Henriquez broke in:

"Don't worry about the *pronunciamientos*. That has been my work. The first lot are to be distributed about dawn to-morrow; then the others follow. They will be posted in every town, and will kill initiative everywhere."

Carlos's grim face brightened as he said enthusiastically:

"That lot of sandpaper that you gave me, Ladbroke, a month ago, has worked like a charm. What a target these troops will make! We can see them for miles. And as regards ammunition, I think I pulled off a master stroke; for the last week I have been distributing the reserve that was here among the different depots—as much as I could without arousing suspicion. Now there is little in Aldaban. Only the *Rurales* are well equipped.

The other troops have only five rounds to a man, and the caissons of the artillery are only half full."

Ladbrook laughed.

"If we can't win with the cards stacked as they are," he said, "we ought to have a nurse. Our plans seem to be working without a hitch."

Harding smiled, too:

"Well, gentlemen, the revolution is moving like clock-work. Everett must have got our word two days ago, and his whole force must now be in motion. I am glad we fixed the rendezvous at Tres Pinos. If we start from here at two o'clock, as arranged, even with the ladies we ought to do the forty miles easily in four hours. Thank God, our horses are fit. I have told Walker and Ben to have them saddled and ready at one o'clock. I count on you, gentlemen, and Mrs. Henriquez, to be here promptly. We'll get away without difficulty, I am sure. Of course Eusebio and his *Rurales* will come after us, but I am sure they'll make a late start. Most of his men are certain to be drunk and scattered over the town, and he won't be certain of the road we have taken."

The Americans were somewhat late in arriving at the ball. It took place in the large apartment in which the reception had been held in the morning. It was purely a civil function, but the officers, however, clung to their dazzling uniforms. The band was seated on the dais at one end of the room, now brilliantly lighted by many candelabra. Around the walls were ranks of gilt chairs, which were already filled. In the middle of the long wall, between two mirrors, seated in large arm-

chairs, were President Obregon and his wife, Donna Elvira, clad in evening dress, the former wearing all his decorations, and the latter blazing with jewels.

The costumes of the younger women were striking in their beauty, and spoke the latest Paris fashions, throwing in somber relief the dresses worn by the duennas, mothers, and elder women, who one and all wore severe black and hid their grizzled hair beneath black lace mantillas. All wore jewels, many of them being magnificent. The air was heavy with the reek of perfume.

Rouge was entirely absent, but the chalk-like faces of the women proved their love of powder. The fresh faces of the American women made a striking contrast.

In a room adjoining supper was served continuously. The only drinks were champagne and lemonade.

"Will you trust me to speak to Don Eusebio and even to dance with him?" asked Margaret, nervously, as they entered the room. "I think it would be wise."

"All right," said Ladbroke, grimly. "I trust you. I fancy this is the last time you will ever see him."

Margaret flushed a little, and then turned pale.

After greeting the president and his wife, the American party took their seats at the end of the room. They had arrived between dances, and they had hardly taken their seats before Eusebio, brilliant in his invariable native costume, approached, bowed, and asked Margaret's hand for the next dance.

Close dancing was taboo in Mescalita. The band played nothing but quadrilles, lancers, and fandangos. But, after all, much may be done by the glance of an eye or the touch of a hand. The young ladies, with their

downcast eyes and ever-moving fans, were most alluring. Their movements were full of grace. The contrast between them and their martial-looking cavaliers was marked. When the band struck up, the floor was instantly covered. It was a feast for the eye.

On going to their places, Eusebio whispered to Margaret:

"I waited for you in vain the other day. My heart is breaking."

Margaret lowered her eyes and said:

"I was prevented."

"When can we meet and where?" asked Eusebio.

Margaret held herself in perfect control, looked Eusebio calmly in the eyes, and said:

"To-morrow. Where, I will not say. I leave it to you to find me."

"Find you I surely will," said Eusebio.

With these words they separated and took their places in the lancers.

The departure of the president's party, which took place early, acted as a spur to the spirits of the assembly, and the dancing became more and more animated. The clanking of spur-clad heels, laughter, and gay shouts seemingly doubled the noise of the band. The supper-room was crowded, too, and more champagne than lemonade was drunk. The gaiety became unrestrained. Young people's eyes danced. The duennas looked on watchfully, but seemingly unmoved. They could trust their charges.

At a little before one the American party left. As

they were moving toward the door, Eusebio found a chance to touch Margaret on the arm and said:

"To-morrow, then. I shall find you without fail."

Margaret could not suppress a half-sob as she looked into his eager eyes for what she thought was perhaps the last time.

The streets near the palace were thronged with people. Torches were blazing, and there were impromptu dances at nearly every corner. But as they approached Harding's house the way became less obstructed with revelers, and in its immediate neighborhood all seemed as quiet as the grave.

They changed into riding-clothes, and had been ready for only a few moments when Ben, who was on guard at the front gate, let in the Mescalian party.

Mrs. Henriquez's bright little face was still covered with powder. She was on her mettle and was, if anything, the calmest of the three women.

"Which horse am I to ride, Violet?" she asked.

"Whichever you like, my dear."

"May I have the little gray?"

This was a cross between a thoroughbred and an Arab, and one of the best horses in the stable.

"All right," said Violet, a little regretfully, for she had counted upon the gray herself.

Margaret broke in:

"Where are your clothes, Clara? We only have one pack-horse, as I told you, and I hope you have not brought too much."

Clara Henriquez laughed gaily.

"I have nothing but the clothes I wear, my jewels, a

tooth-brush, and a bag of rice powder," she declared. "My husband says we shall not be gone long."

Margaret looked relieved, and dashed up-stairs to add another gown to her already large parcel.

The men were quiet and thoughtful. Estrada produced two bottles of old brandy and, giving them to Ladbroke, said:

"This will kill fatigue. We shall be fresh when we get to Tres Pinos." Then looking at the sky, which was dark, but starlit, he said: "Most of the streets are filled with people, but we shall not be noticed if we go by twos a few moments apart and take different roads. Happily, this part of the town is quiet. In half an hour we'll all be together near the review-stand. I'll start first with Carlos."

"All right," said Ladbroke. "We'll now go to the stable and choose our horses.

"Where is Margaret?"

"Packing up another dress," answered Violet, quietly. Harding broke in:

"Go up, Vi, and get her. This is no time for rags."

In a few moments they were all together in the stable. Walker had the horses saddled and ready, and it took only an instant to adjust the stirrups and tighten the girths.

Without a word Carlos and Estrada mounted their horses and moved silently out of the open gate. The he-gira had begun.

CHAPTER XVII

EVERETT rode toward the pass his mind now at ease. He was still more than a mile away from the vast chasm which cleft in twain the giant hills when he noticed a sudden change in the behavior of the natives.

The groups of little brown men, till now almost motionless, suddenly seemed to take on life. There was running hither and thither; shouts were heard. All was motion, like the surface of a calm lake struck by a sudden squall.

He looked for the cause, and in a moment caught sight of Estaban and the other chiefs galloping full speed toward him, wearing their war-bonnets. They were shouting as they came. He pulled up his horse and waited their approach.

They stopped their animals with a jerk on reaching him, and Estaban, his dark, high-featured face calm, but his eyes blazing with excitement, handed him a letter.

He opened it, read it rapidly, then said to Estaban: "You have word, too?"

"Yes," replied the chief. "We are to move at once, and General Carlos says that we are under your orders."

Everett nodded.

"We Americans will march first with the Hualtecos horse," he said. "We'll drive the cattle with us. Give

orders to make a clear path for us between the people. Let the infantry fall in and stand at ease, ready to follow directly the horsemen are on their way. You, Estaban, with your tribe, will come last; keep an eye out for stragglers. The first step is to drive all the women from the camp. Do this at once."

The chiefs saluted and galloped off, shouting as they went.

Everett gave his horse full rein and hurried to the camp of the Americans.

Before he reached it, the deep, piercing sound of his whistle rent the air. His men had been warned of such an emergency, and it was surprising with what little bustle or excitement they struck the few tents, packed the loads of necessities and ammunition, gathered together the herd of cattle, now greatly diminished in number, and, led by Everett, poured like a gently flowing, almost tawny-colored stream, down the path opened for them between the serried ranks of dark-brown faces.

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Before they reached the pass, Estaban galloped up for the last instructions.

Everett said:

"The rendezvous is at Tres Pinos, forty-five miles away. Horses and men are fresh. We'll be there to-morrow night and in good condition. How long will it take the infantry to do that distance?"

"In the same time," replied Estaban. "My men can do forty-five miles in one day without fatigue, if necessary."

"No, no," said Everett; "this is no foot race. Re-

member Tres Pinos is still forty miles from Aldaban. There is hard fighting before us, and you must keep your men fresh. I forbid them to hurry. Take at least three days. The cavalry will have no trouble in holding back the first troops sent from Aldaban. I'll expect you at Tres Pinos day after to-morrow, in the afternoon, not before."

He passed on.

The Americans were in high spirits, laughing and joking like boys. They marched in columns of twos, the fresh horses crowding one another a little. In front of Everett was carried the beautiful Mescalien flag, and small replicas of the same flag were sewed in every Stetson hat; but, added to this, many of the horsemen carried, fastened to their horse's bridles or attached to their shoulders, little American flags.

As they reached the pass, Everett took a last look behind him, and marveled to see with what precision the Hualtecos were falling into line. The first companies were close upon the heels of his men. They moved silently, their black heads bent forward, their eyes gazing upward beneath their heavy hair. Their faces were without expression. Their sandaled feet bore them easily up the steep slope. There was no heel-and-toe march; their shoulders swung from side to side, with their knees bent, their feet close to the ground, as if ready to burst into a run. There were no traces of stiffness, no thought of keeping step. They moved like a tireless tide. Slightly in advance rode one of the chiefs, conspicuous in his headdress, with his mounted staff about him.

At the entrance the pass was nearly a mile wide, but soon it narrowed, and long before the highest point was a scant fifty feet in width, its sides precipitous rock, rose for hundreds of feet above the path. Little sunlight penetrated the gloomy depths, and the air was cold and chill. The path itself was narrow, and lay between great boulders.

The cattle became wild, and their bellowings mingled with the shrieking wind that smote their faces. The way grew steeper and steeper with every step. Horses panted and snorted, and sparks flew from the hoofs of the few that were still shod.

The highest point was reached, and abruptly the scene changed. The chasm ceased, and there opened in its place a wide vista of gently sloping green hills, through which flowed a sparkling stream. One could see it like a silver ribbon crossing the wide plateau until it disappeared into the forest lands below. The country was cultivated high up the sides of the Cordilleras. This was the richest part of the Hualtecos land, the home of Estaban.

Everett turned toward the south. The foothills of the Cordilleras and the abutting plateau covered a wider extent on the east than on the west. These highlands varied from ten to fifteen miles in width, and followed the Cordilleras from north to south throughout the whole breadth of Mescalita. Aldaban was on this plateau, about midway between the low-lying forest-lands, or Tierra Calliente, and the abrupt mountain-range.

This terrain made the strategy of the campaign simple, for the manœuvres were limited to the plateau, and it

was there that the collision between the two armies must perforce take place. Estaban's portion of the Hualtecos country was small in extent, and Everett and his men were out of its boundaries in a few hours. Leaving behind them the numberless close-clustered villages, separated by stretches of land under intense cultivation, they now entered the territory more or less directly under the influence of Aldaban and tributary to it. Instead of a happy communal existence, the land was divided into vast estates, owned by men of Spanish blood, and the inhabitants were virtually serfs, mere earth-workers or peons, and shared not at all in its prosperity. In place of native villages, small towns appeared, where stone houses were not uncommon, whose white walls and red roofs relieved the monotonous green and pleased the eye. Here and there were large haciendas surrounded by their outbuildings, looking, but for the absence of towers and turrets, for all the world like feudal châteaux, proud and dominant in their isolation.

On entering this country Everett missed the friendly attitude of the Hualtecos. He took greater precautions, threw out flankers, and marched in a more military manner. The inhabitants seemed excited, but were too much surprised by his rapid progress to show real hostility; moreover, the owners of the haciendas and the upper classes were all in Aldaban for the national holiday. There were no leaders left to organize resistance, even was such possible.

The road they traveled was wide. Good bridges were found thrown across the many streams that flowed from

the mountains. They were entering the most civilized and best organized portion of Mescalía. Few of the inhabitants, despite their evident curiosity, had the courage to ask questions; but sometimes, on passing through a village, a priest would leave his little church and shout a query. Everett had ordered his men to make only one reply: "Peace. Liberty, equality, and prosperity. Fear nothing."

It was years since this country had been trampled by the feet of warriors; but the people, seeing they were in no way molested, simply shrugged their shoulders and went back to their affairs once the force had passed. They showed no desire to follow in Everett's wake. Occasionally, however, some more daring spirit would mount his horse and start to ride with the cavalry. These were invariably turned back with a warning.

Everett threw out small bodies of men on each flank to cover all roads and prevent the news of his advance from spreading toward Aldaban.

At six in the evening they made a hurried camp. Everett changed horses and made a quick inspection of his outposts, arranged for their relief at midnight, and returned to his tent, in front of which the flag of Mescalía fluttered on a high pole.

At sundown the next day they reached Tres Pinos. This was a small village in the center of the plateau, lying at the foot of a sharply conical hill on the top of which grew three enormous pine-trees. Near by was a large hacienda. On each side of the road were wide-spread orchards of cocoa and coffee-plants.

Everett made the center of his line at the village,

and moved his headquarters to the hacienda. He found, to his surprise and pleasure, that it was the property of Don Carlos, brought to him as a dowry by his wife. She was now in residence, and was supposed to be in ill health, but appeared full of activity and gave a warm welcome.

She was of mixed blood, and her dark complexion laid stress on the potency of the native strain. Her face wore a wearied look, but this passed off as soon as she had arranged for the proper reception of her guest, and it was a lady full of quiet dignity and repose who presided over the table when dinner was ready. She had had no news of her husband for several weeks, and seemed interested to learn that Don Carlos was to be looked for at any moment.

Everett wondered at the marked discretion of Don Carlos, and he admired him for it. At the same time he was greatly impressed by the attitude of his wife, her calm confidence in her husband and the lack of curiosity she showed as to his affairs and movements. There are fine qualities in the Spanish character, and dignity is one of them.

Everett rose before dawn, and, accompanied by Bol-lard, carefully inspected the arrangement of his troops. He had kept the Americans in his immediate neighborhood, but had thrown strong outposts of Hualtecos across the entire front of the plateau and three miles away.

It was eight o'clock when he returned to the hacienda. He heard voices as he entered, and great was his joy to see, sitting in the long, low dining-room, drinking coffee, his friends from Mescalita.

They looked dusty and tired, but were chatting cheerfully; the ladies were somewhat disheveled.

Violet noticed him first, jumped to her feet, and with a "May I?" to her husband, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. Then, standing to one side and patting him on the shoulder, she said:

"Good old Bill!"

Mrs. Henriquez seemed surprised at her friend's enthusiasm, and, looking from one to the other, laughed nervously. Neither she nor Margaret rose from their seats.

Everett shook hands with them all and took a chair.

"Well, how goes it?" he said.

One could see that he was proud and happy and full of confidence. *He* had had a good night's rest.

It was Carlos who spoke first. Turning to his wife, he told her to take the ladies up-stairs and make them comfortable.

It was evident that he intended to assume his authority as general in chief. Everett noticed this, and sighed as he said to himself: "Good-by to supreme power! I hope the old cock won't make it too hard for me to work with him."

Harding rapped on the table and said:

"Have you laid the telephone wire, Bill?"

"Yes. It runs from the pass to Lipaza, where I have left a good man."

Harding took a small dictionary from his pocket, and after a moment's study handed Everett an unsigned paper carrying, besides the address, "Wallace, Wall Street, New York," only two numbers, "11-4."

"Now, Bill, rush this to the wire."

A mounted man took it and sped to the pass.

This done, Harding continued:

"We've got a hard day before us. We'll get no sleep." And turning to Ladbroke, he added: "Run out, Dick, and get the rest of that brandy that Estrada gave us. I think there is nearly a bottle left. It will go well with this coffee."

Carlos smiled, and clapped his hands. A native servant appeared instantly. He told him to bring a case of champagne and to prepare a hearty breakfast.

"The breakfast is all right," said Harding. "But I think we'll all agree to save our thirsts, after this little nip of brandy we're going to get, until we've taken Aldaban. I move that all the wine and liquor that is here be kept for the wounded. They'll need it. What do you say, Doc?" This to one of the doctors who had come with Everett.

He was a cheery, red-nosed young fellow, with an Irish face, and his eyes twinkled as he said:

"I'm glad you're leavin' the stuff for us. My hand is always steadier for a little drop."

Everett broke in:

"You ought to see the medical outfit we've got, operating-tables and all."

The doctors nodded, and one of them said:

"We've got nothing to do with your military movements; but if you expect hard fighting and a lot of wounded soon, we ought to start getting a hospital ready at once."

Everett turned to Carlos.

"Where are we to fight the battle, General?"

Carlos brushed the coffee-drops from his heavy mustache and said:

"If I know Obregon, he'll come after us without delay. He is a high-spirited old man and full of fight. We'll be able to pick our own battle-ground, and I have already made up my mind where it is to be—about five miles away toward Aldaban. The country is fairly open and level, and there is a spur running from the Cordilleras three miles into the plain, which here has few streams crossing it. We'll seize that spur. That shortens the width of the plateau to seven miles, plenty of room."

"That being the case," said Everett, "why not pitch the hospital here, in your hacienda and the outbuildings? It is ideally sheltered from the enemy by Tres Pinos hill."

"Good," said Carlos. And turning to the doctors, said: "Make yourselves at home. I have plenty of servants here at your disposal, and I am sure the ladies will help as nurses."

"We'll start at once," said the doctors, and left the room.

Carlos took up a pencil and a piece of paper.

"How many men are with you, Everett?"

"Five hundred Americans, two thousand five hundred Hualtecos, all cavalry. Seventeen thousand five hundred infantry are due to arrive to-night. They will be fresh as paint. I made them take three days to do the forty-five miles. If Obregon's men don't get here till to-morrow, we should all be in position and ready for them."

Neither Estrada nor Henriquez had spoken a word. They sat quietly with their eyes on Carlos, who sat near them. Harding and Ladbroke sat with Everett. It looked as if the group was cut in half, natives against Americans.

Harding's quick eye noticed this, and saw that strife was to be avoided at any cost.

Though not such a soldier of fortune as Everett, and lacking his experience, he had played no mean part in several hard revolutions. He knew the enormous value of the five hundred Americans, but he also knew the tenderness of native pride; and he quickly made up his mind to take sides with Everett should either of two contingencies arise; if the battle was going favorably, not to let the natives win it without the Americans; if the fight should be a hard one, not to allow the Mes-calians to sacrifice the Yankee force needlessly.

From this point of view this was more an American adventure than anything else. He swore to himself that Everett's men should have all the chances coming to them.

Carlos tapped his pencil on the table.

"We don't know exactly what's going on in Aldaban. I have ordered men to bring me news, but don't expect them till to-night or to-morrow. But we can guess pretty well what's going on. Obregon is an old soldier. While we are sitting here, he has had news of our flight, and the first *pronunciamientos* are in his hands.

"What would we do were we in his place? He knows that we have fled to the Hualtecos, but he does not know how well armed they are, or anything about Everett's

force. He probably supposes that we intend to fight at the pass in the Cordilleras. If he thinks this, he'll be in no great hurry. He will first organize his cavalry, Eusebio and the twenty-five hundred *Rurales*; added to this, Eusebio's young friends among the *haciendados*, with their following, say, fifteen hundred in all, who are in Aldaban for the festa. These, added to the two thousand regular cavalry, make six thousand mounted men. They'll start at ten o'clock about; and if I know Eusebio, they'll make speed.

"We have only half that force, but ours will be fresh and better armed. We have the choice of the terrain, and I propose that we begin the struggle with a cavalry battle."

Everett raised his hand.

"Wait a moment, please," said Carlos, "till I finish. Even before Obregon will have despatched the cavalry, he will start inspecting the infantry and artillery, and find how short they are of ammunition. Some of the depots are not far away, unfortunately; and he should have enough to fill the men's cartridge boxes and to fill the artillery caissons some time to-night. Then he'll push forward at once, without waiting for further supplies, letting them follow him as best they can. Now, Everett, how does this strike you?"

Everett was glad that he had not interrupted Carlos. He saw the wisdom of what he said and the clearness of his vision; but he regretted now that he had told the infantry to march so slowly.

He said:

"All right, General. You know Obregon well. So

I take it for granted that what you say is right. You say Eusebio will start about ten o'clock. Even if he is impetuous, he cannot be altogether a damn fool, and he should not try to make more than six miles an hour. That would bring him here about four this afternoon. Why not send back and tell the infantry to make more speed? They may be useful at a pinch."

Carlos smiled.

"If you knew my people as well as I do, you would not have reduced their speed to fifteen miles a day. They are virtually tireless, and knowing their impetuosity as I do, I feel certain they are not far away from us now. They are keen to get this job over and get back to their villages. Who are the leaders of your Hualtecos cavalry?"

Everett named them. On hearing their names, Carlos nodded and said:

"They're good men. Now, send out to any one of those leaders and get him to assign five of his best mounted and most intelligent men and bring them here at once. I'll send them back after the infantry. I am sure they won't have to go far."

Everett nodded to Bollard, who went out on the message.

"Now," said Carlos, "let's get to work. If we have a cavalry fight to-day, I'll let you take charge, Everett. We'll arrange the details presently." Then, turning to Estrada, he said: "You, Don Emilio and Henriquez, will stay here and help me with the infantry." Then, rising briskly from his chair, he added: "Now, we'll make our inspection and choose our battle-ground."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE day after the festa dawn broke as usual in Aldaban. It was the same old sun but it was a changed town that met its burning rays.

Obregon, true to his native ancestry, rose at break of day. He had dressed and was sitting in his office, drinking coffee, when an aide burst in and announced the appearance throughout the town of the first *pronunciamientos*. He showed a crumpled copy that he had torn from the very wall of the palace.

Obregon finished his coffee, put on his spectacles, and read the paper slowly. He read it again before he spoke. Then he uttered but two words, "The Americans!" Turning to his aide and peering at him over his spectacles, he shouted out:

"Surround the houses of Ladbrook and Harding. Seize their bank and send word to Don Eusebio, Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez, telling them to be here at eight o'clock. And look sharp," he added roughly, for he saw that the young man's eyes were heavy with lack of sleep, and he appeared almost stupid after the night's excesses.

The aide left. Obregon rose, rang a bell, and then, carefully placing himself behind a curtain, peered out into the square facing the palace.

All was in confusion there. The markets, usually crowded even at this early hour, were deserted of buyers. The proprietors shouted to one another, and some gathered up their wares and loaded them on carts or donkeys. Soldiers, evidently the worse for the night's dissipation, ran hither and thither, half dressed. Officers in a like state were bawling orders. Crowds of men, women, and children of the lower classes were already forming and gazing up at the palace.

Obregon looked at his watch, and saw it was a quarter past six, then his eyes caught sight of the great clock on the war department on the opposite side of the square. The hands pointed to eight o'clock.

Gazing again at his watch, he threw it angrily on the table, saying, "The world is upside down!"

In answer to his ring, another aide appeared, arranging his coat as he entered the room.

"Why the devil aren't you dressed?" shouted the president. "Here it is eight o'clock, and your duty begins at six!"

The aide saluted.

"Pardon, Excellency. The clock in the guard-room down-stairs reads only five-thirty."

Obregon seized him by the shoulder and pointed to the clock across the square.

"You drunken lout! Use your eyes!" he exclaimed. "Now send the officer in command of the guard to me at once."

Obregon became calmer as he paced to and fro, and it was with his usual serenity that he greeted the officer of the day when he entered.

"Place double guards at every door," he said. "Order the fourth and sixth infantry regiments to form up in the square at nine o'clock sharp. Order the first and second cavalry to patrol the town by troops."

The man left. The door had hardly closed behind him when Obregon, moving swiftly, raised a curtain, which disclosed another door, through which he passed into a dark passage communicating with his wife's apartments. He broke the news to her quietly, and, telling her to keep away from the windows, returned to his office.

He had just taken his seat when the first aide returned, and in an excited voice announced that there was no trace of the Americans or of Estrada, Carlos, or Henriquez, and that he had managed with some difficulty to arouse Eusebio. He added that a guard had been placed around the houses of the Americans and at the American bank.

Obregon nodded and said:

"Place guards also at the houses of the absent ministers."

A loud rap was heard at the door, and as Obregon called "Open!" Eusebio burst into the room. His eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks unshaven and his gait somewhat unsteady. Obregon motioned him to a chair and dismissed the aide. For a moment he looked at Eusebio, and then said:

"This is a nice mess we're in. You and Schwartz, playing upon my good nature, forced me to be too rough on the Americans. Good nature is a crime in a ruler, and leads invariably to trouble and bloodshed." Then shrugging his shoulders and raising his voice, he added:

"Bloodshed let it be! I am an old man, but I will not go down without a fight."

Eusebio looked at him as if only half awake. He spoke no word. Obregon gazed at him fixedly and said: "Pull yourself together. Listen to me, and carry out exactly every order I give you. First, the Americans have fled"—Eusebio started,—"and with them, presumably, have gone Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez. They can have gone only to the Hualtecos to organize those wretches. The three ministers were the only real men in my cabinet. The first step is to form another one. Here are the names. Go yourself and bring these men here at once. I shall be my own secretary of war, and command the troops in person. I put you in command of all the cavalry. You have boasted of your influence over the youth of this country. Get together all the young *hacendados*, with their servants, and join them to your *Rurales*. The regular cavalry you may leave here with me.

"At eleven o'clock I shall be at the review-ground to inspect you and your *Rurales* and volunteers, who must be thoroughly equipped and prepared to march at that time. *Go!*"

Eusebio passed his hand across his brow and muttered to himself: "She told me I must find her. I will."

Obregon's eyes flashed.

"Hurry, young man," he ordered. "Remember you are fighting for your interests and life as well as for mine. Send Schwartz to me."

Eusebio, impressed by the vigor of the president, pulled himself together, saluted, and went out.

Obregon rang a ball. When the aide entered, he gave him a slip of paper.

"Notify these officers to meet me here in an hour," he said. "That is,"—looking at the clock across the way,—“at nine-thirty.”

The door once closed, a look of fatigue passed across the old man's face; but he shook himself together and squared his shoulders, like the real fighter he was. Just then he heard a timid feminine voice saying: "May I come in, dear?"

Before he could answer, his wife stood before him.

Donna Elvira, leaning her hands upon the desk, gazed into her husband's eyes. The look of courage she met there warmed her heart, and drawing herself up to her full, graceful height, she said softly:

"Sylvio, my brave lion, we shall win."

Her husband's eyes, without losing their hard expression, seemed to envelop her, and, while taking in all the details of her face and form, to pierce her very heart. She drew a long breath, and a slight flush colored her pale face.

"Sit down, Elvira," said Obregon. "We have but a moment, and I have much to say. I am myself again. My eyes, blinded by years of passion, now see clearly. I've been a doting fool and allowed you to lead me with your soft hands into this plight."

Elvira started to speak.

"Not a word!" said Obregon, roughly. "I see it clearly now. You have thought more of your brother's fortunes than of mine. You blinded me with your woman's wiles and led me to support your brother and

Schwartz in their plans until I have made the Americans desperate. I go forth to fight the last great battle of my life, and Eusebio goes with me. You stay here. Should I win, never again shall I listen to your counsels. Should I lose, for what will happen you have only yourself to blame.

"Now go to your apartments. Until I leave the city, everything which I eat or drink must be prepared and tasted first by you."

Donna Elvira opened her lips as if to speak.

"Not a word," said Obregon. "Go!"

The woman folded her hands across her breast, bowed her proud head submissively, and glided from the room.

Obregon looked at the clock across the way. It was striking nine. The troops he had ordered should be taking their places in the square, but there was no sign of them. He rang a bell. To the aide who entered he said:

"You gave that order, did you not? Where are those troops? It is nine o'clock."

"I gave the order, Excellency," said the young man, saluting.

"Well," said Obregon, coldly, "go and repeat it, and find out the reason for this delay."

While the aide was absent on his mission, the statesmen summoned by Eusebio arrived. The meeting was dominated by Obregon, the ministry formed, and the portfolios distributed. The civil policing of the town was arranged for and a search ordered for the distributors of the *pronunciamientos*. He ordered them to print at once a *pronunciamiento* of his own, and to send

it broadcast. Before that could be done, to announce it by word of mouth. In it he used the same old words, "liberty, equality, prosperity," and claimed to be the only pure patriot, and the enemy of *all* foreigners.

As the newly-made ministry was bowing itself out, Obregon's eyes fell upon his watch.

"Wait a moment, gentlemen. What time have we?"

One and all produced their watches, and it was found their time agreed with his—a quarter to eight.

"Now," said Obregon, pointing to the clock across the way, "there is some devilry here." Then, with a cold smile, he added: "I think we may safely call *our* time official. So give orders at once to examine the clocks in all public buildings and set the time by ours. Now, gentlemen, to your officers; and speed the work." As the door closed, Obregon gnashed his teeth and muttered, "The American devils!"

Animals and men put their best foot forward when at bay. Obregon was no exception. Despite twenty years of effortless rule and the laziness of habit engendered by such a life, now that his power and perhaps his very life were at stake, these twenty years slipped from him as a garment from the shoulders of an athlete stepping into the ring, and, despite his age, the real man, full of cold purpose and fearless judgment, stood revealed. The almost undying qualities of his Indian blood shone forth. He rose from his chair, gazed at himself in a mirror, rose upon his toes, stretched his arms. With a grim smile of satisfaction, he took his seat, saying to himself, "I am still a man."

Schwartz appeared. He bowed a little too low and

took the seat offered him. Obregon smiled at him grimly.

"Well, Schwartz, you're between the devil and the deep sea. I feel sure, at least, that I can count upon you, for all your plans and even your life depend upon my success. Now, how about that artillery?"

Schwartz paled a little as he said in a low voice:

"Excellency, it looks bad. Krupp cabled that the guns left Hamburg fifteen days ago. It is now three days since they should have been at Cruz Chico. Before coming here, I tried to call up that town, but I failed. The operator with whom I talked said that he believed some accident had happened to the line; but I think, or at least fear, that the wires are cut. This looks as if Robledo was against us. If so, the Krupp guns will fall into our enemies' hands."

Obregon closed his eyes and then said calmly: "I suppose you are telling the truth, but it is you who are responsible for these guns. Go at once to Cruz Chico by special train if necessary. Bring up the artillery at any cost immediately. There are plenty of flat-cars. Do not bring them to Aldaban, but unload them at Las Palmas, fifteen miles from here, and rush them to my hacienda on the road to Tres Pinos, where, if I am absent, you will find orders what to do."

Schwartz drew himself up, clicked his heels together, and saluted.

"You may count upon me, Excellency," he declared. "I ask nothing better than to obey orders, fight, and, if need be, die at your side."

They were interrupted by sounds in the square.

"Go to the window, Schwartz," said Obregon, "and tell me what's passing."

"Infantry lining the square," reported the German.

Obregon looked at his watch, and then at the clock across the way. As he gazed, he saw they were setting it. The hands moved back, and in a moment eight o'clock rang out clearly in the air. He showed his watch to Schwartz, with a smile. It read eight o'clock. He explained the tampering with the clocks.

Schwartz looked astounded and said:

"Colossal! I shall report that to our general staff."

"It was a wasted effort here," said Obregon. "It has not delayed us an hour, but it shows what fruitful minds those damned Yankees have, and warns me to prepare for the worst. I was an ass to back a German against them." Schwartz flushed. "They waste no time goose-stepping, but organize quietly and strike like lightning. I wonder how many of my officers they have bought. This we'll soon know. Now, Schwartz, you know whom we have got to beat before you can play 'Deutschland über Alles.' "

He scratched a note on a pad, stamped it with his seal, and handed it to Schwartz.

"Here's authority for you as bearer of this order to act. Bring up those guns."

Obregon's mind grew clearer every moment. Summoning an aide to take his place at his desk, he went to his apartments and put on his full-dress uniform and all his decorations. He ordered a band in the square to strike up the national anthem, and then, from

the window, harangued the troops and the populace. He was greeted with cheers.

He mounted his horse, and, accompanied by a strong body-guard of cavalry, inspected the barracks. He found the shortage of ammunition. He requisitioned every wagon in town, and sent them to the depots for supplies.

Eleven o'clock saw him at the review-ground, wishing Don Eusebio with his four thousand mounted men God-speed. He gave orders to try to reach the pass of the Cordilleras, but to avoid combat if the enemy should, by any chance, be in force, which he believed impossible. Should they meet opposition, to skirmish long enough to find out the numbers against them, and then fall back to the neighborhood of Tres Pinos and there await him. He would march directly the ammunition arrived from the depots, shortly before dark, with the entire army available. Once together, they would march to the pass, capture it, and wipe out the Hualtecos once and for all, and reestablish peace forever in the land.

Eusebio saluted. The cavalry galloped past, cheering, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Obregon returned to Aldaban. He was everywhere, putting life into every movement. By three o'clock sufficient ammunition had reached Aldaban to enable him to move. Early in the morning he had closed every *pulperia*, or wine shop. There was not a drink to be had in the town. By five o'clock the entire army was massed in the neighborhood of the review-ground.

He harangued his officers, thanking them for their loyalty, and was greeted by particularly enthusiastic

cheers when he pointed to a long line of carts and wagons laden with barrels and said:

"There we have courage for your troops. Each barrel is full of mescal. We shall fight and win like true Mescalians."

The army did not make a bad showing, despite their slatternly uniforms. In front were drawn up the two thousand regular cavalry, then came the artillery, and then the infantry, fourteen thousand men in all.

When Obregon finished speaking, a calash galloped up, drawn by a magnificent horse mounted by a postilion. Behind it, mounted by grooms, came the two horses Obregon was accustomed to ride. He intended saving their strength and his for the moment of conflict.

He climbed into the calash, and surrounded by the cavalry, the indomitable old man went forth to meet his fate.

CHAPTER XIX

DON CARLOS'S hacienda could not have made a better hospital had this purpose been in view when it was built. Two stories high, it was constructed around a large open square, in the center of which bubbled a circular, walled-in spring. An inner veranda ran its entire length, and straw was placed beneath this for the wounded soldiers. Beds were placed in three of the larger rooms for the officers, and the well-lighted dining-room became the operating-theater.

Much to Mrs. Ladbrook's disgust, the surgeons objected to her pretty gowns, and the women were forced to make use of the shapeless black garments worn by their aged hostess. However, they got some pleasure in arranging the white kerchiefs which covered their hair; for, with a little effort, these were made to produce an almost coquettish effect.

Estrada joined the ladies, and complimented them on their devotion and praised their appearance collectively, and then, singling out Mrs. Ladbrook, disappeared with her in the coffee-grove.

Shortly before noon came the good news that the Hualtecos infantry was approaching rapidly, and that the entire force would arrive in less than two hours.

Carlos and Everett decided to act without delay. Two Hualtecos scouts had already been sent to report on

Eusebio's advance, which was, they felt certain, to be looked for that day.

Carlos and Everett, with a thousand Hualtecos horse and the five hundred Americans, with whom rode Harding and Ladbrook, set out for the spur which cut deeply into the plateau, five miles away. Here, on the end of the spur, pits were dug, and the ten machine-guns set up.

On the northern side of the spur, and thus completely hidden from the view of Eusebio's men, who must approach from the south, Everett and his cavalry took their stand. They dismounted, maintained their formation in a loose manner, letting their horses crop grass, but holding them by the reins.

Everett and Carlos had worked out their plans to the last detail, and the latter now left Everett in charge and returned to Tres Pinos.

Everett, Harding, and Ladbrook lay down on the top of the spur, taking turns in scanning the plateau, here quite free of trees, which stretched before them to the south.

Suddenly Harding, who was using the field-glasses, shouted out:

"Here come our scouts, Bill."

In the far distance were seen two horsemen approaching at a rapid gait. Everett blew a preconcerted signal on his whistle, and the thousand Hualtecos swung to their saddles and formed in column of fours. In a few moments the scouts reached the spur, and Everett called them to him by his whistle.

"Well, what news?" he said.

The elder of the two extended his arms and said:

"Many men coming on horses."

"How many?" said Everett.

"Many, many. More horses than we have. Many *Rurales* and many caballeros with their servants. A big chief with plenty gold on his hat leads them."

"How are their horses, tired?" asked Everett.

"No; coming very steady." Then, pointing to the sun and swinging his hand some distance to the west, the scout added, "Will be here soon."

From the gesture Everett knew he meant to say in two hours.

"In what formation are they coming?" asked Everett.

"Plenty trees where we saw them. Coming three and four together, sometimes five, six. Coming steady. Coming close up."

"Good boy!" said Everett.

He scratched a note on a pad, and gave the paper to the Hualtecos.

"Take this to General Carlos at Tres Pinos. Go on fast."

The men left.

Everett again blew his whistle, and the thousand Hualtecos, led by a chief striking in his gaudy head-dress, broke into a trot, and swung around the base of the spur, then, at an easy lope, pursued their way due south. Everett gave a few last instructions to the machine-gun squad, and then, with his two companions, descended the northern slope of the spur and joined Bollard and the five hundred Americans.

The men were in fine spirits, and though far from being nervous or excited, seemed very wide awake.

Bogan and the three outlaws held Everett's and his friends' horses as well as their own. Everett passed them without a word and walked to where Bollard, sitting on the ground and holding his horse, was facing the long line of five hundred men similarly employed.

He shouted out:

"Now listen, boys, and pay strict attention. You know what you've got to do, but I'll tell you over again.

"When I blow my first whistle, you form up where you are in two lines parallel to one another and about two hundred yards apart. Bollard and Watson command the first line; I, the second. The first line takes orders from Bollard. You know the sound of his whistle. The second line takes orders from me. In a short time you will hear scattered shooting. Then you'll hear the machine-guns rattle. Pay no attention to those noises, but listen to my whistle and do what it says. The Hualtecos are leading the enemy to us, and they will bring them right to the spur.

"The first lot to pass this spur will be the Hualtecos, who will swing in behind us and reform after their retreat, ready to act as the occasion arises. Pay no attention to them.

"When I whistle, the two lines must advance at a gallop. Bollard and his men will attack the Mescalians in the flank and ride straight through them; reform and ride back again. I, with my line, on passing the spur, will turn to the south and attack the enemy at about their center.

"You boys have each got two revolvers and a carbine and should do good execution; but don't waste time taking aim. Remember the shock is the thing; and from the minute of our advance I want you all to give a good old-fashioned rebel yell and keep it up until you get to close quarters.

"Now, I know your guns are all loaded, but I'm going to inspect them. And also I want to see whether you've done as I told you—put your loose revolver ammunition in your left pocket and the stuff for your carbines in your right."

His remarks were greeted by smiles, as the men rose to their feet for the inspection, produced their revolvers, and drew their carbines from the saddle-holsters.

The inspection passed off rapidly, and met a good deal of chaff, such as: "We get you, General." "We'll soak them Greasers good and hard." And some began, until checked by Everett, to practise the rebel yell.

The inspection over, he held up his hand as a signal for silence, and listened intently; but heard nothing.

"We've got plenty of time," he said. "You might as well form the two lines now." They did.

"Now take it easy," he said, "and don't mount until I whistle."

Then he and his friends, accompanied by Bollard, climbed to the top of the spur and, concealing themselves behind a rock, gazed anxiously toward the south.

Nearly an hour passed before they saw a cloud of dust rising in the distance. This approached, and now their keen ears distinguished the sound of scattered shots. On came the cloud and through the glasses they

made out their friends, the Hualtecos, riding at a hard gallop and headed toward the spur. They were coming in an irregular line, but in fairly good order, for all the world like Comanches, their horses apparently unguided, the riders either loading, or shooting over their shoulders at the enemy close at their heels.

"Those Hualtecos are damned good Indians," said Bollard. "Those fellers are always best at a running fight, and their old chief is handling them well."

It could be seen that the freshness of the Hualtecos' horses was standing them in good stead, and that they could, if need be, easily outdistance their adversaries; but they were carrying out their orders well, and keeping in close touch with Eusebio's horse, and this notwithstanding that there were plenty of riderless horses among them, a proof that they were receiving punishment and standing up well under it.

The dust cloud was thick, but one could see enough to show that Eusebio had fallen into the trap, and was pursuing the Hualtecos with his whole force and at the best speed that his tired horses would permit.

Everett shouted to the machine-gun men:

"Get ready, boys! Remember, don't fire until the Hualtecos have passed, and cease firing directly we Yanks get to the end of the spur. You've got a fine target and should do a good job. Remember, don't begin too soon and be sure to quit soon enough."

"All right, Boss. Leave it to us," said their leader.

Everett and his companions descended the spur. He blew his whistle. The men swung into their saddles, gathered their reins in their left hands, the right hold-

ing Colts. Bollard and Watson took their places in the middle of the front line. Everett placed Harding and Ladbroke on the extreme left of his line, and he, with Deaf Banks and his three companions, took position on the right, just under the spur.

As Harding and Ladbroke left for their places, Everett said:

"Remember, boys, our line pivots on me. We'll turn south directly we pass the spur."

Now the thunder of hoofs could be heard, sounding as an accompaniment to the crack of carbine-fire and in a few moments the Hualtecos appeared and swung widely in behind them, well under the spur. The rattle of the machine-guns began sharply and dominated everything. Everett whistled, and with a magnificent yell the five hundred Americans jumped into the fray.

The work of the machine-guns had been deadly. The ground in front of the point of the spur was covered with prostrated horses and men; but the Mescalians, though taken by surprise, were still pressing on. As Bollard with his men struck them in the flank, they seemed to hesitate; and then, under the impact of the Americans, broke and turned their tired horses at full speed toward the east.

Everett's quick eyes told him that these were the *Rurales*, and he saw with a flash of satisfaction that the mass behind, and still coming on with unchecked speed, were the young *hacendados*, led by Don Eusebio himself.

The wheel of Everett's force to the right was not done with parade-like precision, but achieved a success,

and one could see that Eusebio and his men, though still coming on, were rattled and confused, howbeit they had been little touched by the machine-gun fire.

Suddenly, seemingly as one man, they recognized the nationality of the attacking force, and a fierce roar burst from the *haciendados*:

“Los Gringos! Los Americanos!”

Gathering themselves together, not under orders, but inspired by undying hatred, and spurring on their tired horses and waving their machetes in the air, they kept on their way against the Americans.

These, knee to knee, their bridles loose, a revolver in each hand, spitting death, came on, their rebel yell rising to a scream.

The shock was terrific. Horses were thrown back on their haunches, and many fell. It was a true mêlée. The revolvers emptied, the men stuck them into their belts. Carbines were seized and used as clubs.

Everett glanced hurriedly about him. Banks and Bogan were fighting desperately, evidently striving to protect him, their chief, as far as possible. Their two companions had disappeared. He could not see Ladbrook, but Harding had apparently lost his place, and was fighting near at hand.

Things were going none too well. The *haciendados* were fighting like lions. They outnumbered Everett's force nearly six to one, and he prayed for the arrival of Bollard and his men.

Taking advantage of the protection given him by Banks and Bogan, he hastily reloaded one of his revolvers. He was glad he did so, for he had hardly

snapped together his Colt when he perceived Don Eusebio hewing his way toward him, his long saber dripping with blood.

Before he could shoot, Eusebio had cut down Banks, and they were face to face.

"Hands up, Eusebio!" he shouted.

Eusebio, his face covered with dust and sweat, but his gilt hat still on his head, made no reply. Everett dropped him where he stood.

The fall of their leader passed unnoticed by his followers, and they continued to fight with admirable desperation. Things looked black, when suddenly the rebel yell again rose upon the air, and Bollard and his men broke like a tidal-wave on the *haciendados'* flank. The fight was over, the ground literally covered with dead and dying.

In a near distance the survivors of the *Rurales* and *haciendados* could be seen making their way as fast as possible to the south. Pursuit was no part of Everett's plan. He was watching them retire with indifference when the machine-guns rattled again, acting as an efficient spur to the retreating force. They, with yells and curses, urged their tired horses till out of range, and then at a slower gait pushed on their way, eloquent messengers to carry the story of their defeat to President Obregon.

Everett drew a long breath and looked about him, his heart beating high with a sense of victory. It was not a pleasant sight that met his eyes, but he was a soldier, and his life of adventure enabled him to view with true perspective death in any form. He set little

value upon his own life, and virtually none whatever on the lives of his associates. As for the loss inflicted upon the enemy, the greater, the better. It was all in the game, and to win the game was the thing, and real victory is never inexpensive.

He caught sight of Bollard near by, sitting slouched upon his horse, breathing hard, and mopping his forehead with a handkerchief. He shouted to him. Almost at his feet Bogan was sitting, bandaging roughly a great gash in the head of Deaf Banks, which lay on his lap.

"Aren't you wasting your time, Bogan?"

"Not a bit, Boss. He ain't dead. He's a head like an iron kettle. He got a right smart rap, though."

Harding, leading his horse carefully among the bodies, caught sight of Everett and shouted out:

"Where's Dick?"

"Don't know yet. Here, Wesley, don't lead your horse. Some of our fellows are alive, and you know as well as I do that a horse steps more carefully if you are on its back."

He blew his whistle to attract attention, and then shouted out:

"All able-bodied men leave the field, turn your horses loose back of the spur, and come back here to help the wounded." Turning to Bollard, he added:

"Those Hualtecos never helped us a bit in the last part. Put half of them to work with their machetes, cutting poles for stretchers. Their serapes will do fine for that. The rest can bring up their horses to take back such of the wounded as are able to ride."

He gave Bollard a paper.

"Send this to General Carlos," he said. "I am telling him to push up a burying squad at once, say a thousand men, with picks and shovels. We must clean up this mess, for we may have to use this spur again; and I'm warning the doctors to make preparations for a lot of wounded."

Bollard gave the paper to a cowboy, then cantered off, and in a few moments returned, accompanied by the unwounded Americans.

His own men had suffered little loss, the *Rurales* having given way on the first contact. It was Everett's line that had suffered more, and a quick survey showed more than eighty on the ground. Of these, eighteen proved to be dead outright, and the rest terribly cut by the well-handled machetes of Eusebio's men.

Among the dead was Ladbroke, his head cleft almost to the chin. With him lay four other Americans, desperately wounded; the number of dead *haciendados* lying in their immediate neighborhood showed what a battle Harding's partner had put up.

Skelly and Longbow were still alive, but badly wounded. Bogan had bandaged their hurts as best he could, and was giving them, as well as Deaf Banks, who had now come to himself, long draughts from a bottle of mescal he had picked up somewhere. They accepted their hurts good-naturedly and grinned as they took the drink offered them. Longbow even tried to talk, though he had a deep gash across his cheek that severed his upper lip.

"No more of this for me, old scout," said he. "Train-robbin' for mine every time."

It was the younger men who took their hurts more to heart. Some of these were even whimpering, but that was more from excitement and the reaction of the struggle than because of pain. Soon those able to ride were placed on horses and led to Tres Pinos, and in a short time the first stretchers were ready, and the more severely wounded borne away.

Then Everett and his men, keeping a sharp eye upon the Hualtecos lest they commit some atrocity, set to work on the wounded of the enemy.

Owing to the close range, the machine-gun fire had been perfect, and most of the Rurales who had fallen under it were killed outright. Some few needed attention, however.

It was easy to distinguish the *hacendados*, not only by their different dress, but because they were lying huddled together in a different place, where Everett's men had pinned them by their terrific charge. There were four hundred dead, all shot in front, most of them in the head or the upper part of the body, a fact that spoke volumes for the revolver practice of Everett's men.

There were a few who gave signs of life, and among these was Eusebio. The light-colored blood frothing from his lips proved that Everett's bullet had struck him in the lungs. He and his wounded comrades were carefully tended and placed on litters, and, accompanied by a strong guard of Americans, were carried to Tres Pinos.

Not until all this was done did Everett think of leaving the field. The sun had just dropped behind the Cordilleras, and the light was low.

Everett, caught by a quick, cold blast from the snow-capped hills, put up his collar, and, irritated by the chill, turned his eyes toward the mountains. Though a man of little imagination, he was struck, as most real men are, by the futility, the weakness, of the passing ventures of man in the face of the imperturbable forces of nature.

By the clock it should have been yet bright day, and not a cloud brushed the surface of the sky; but the Cordilleras hid the sun. Why this cold, smiting blast? This, too, came from the snow-topped Cordilleras. For both darkness and wind the mountains were to blame. He himself was in no hurry to move, but he felt pushed to action by those calm, cold hills.

His eyes were smitten by the far-stretching line of small, sharply defined, snowy peaks. He looked at them with a certain feeling of impotent anger. "Well, those mountains have seen this game. They've seen many others and they will see a lot more."

He shrugged his shoulders, and with Harding and Bollard turned his head toward Tres Pinos.

Harding seemed grief-stricken by the death of Ladbrook, and his eyes never left the body of his friend, which was being carried on a stretcher by his side.

"Poor old Dick!" said Everett. "He must have put up a great fight."

Harding sighed.

"I'm sure he did. He was a crack shot and quick as lightning. I can't see how they got him. He made me leave him and join you, for he said that your end of the line was sure to get the worst of it."

"Too bad you left him," said Everett. "I was all right with those four train robbers by my side. Well, there's no use kicking. He did not have luck, that's all. You'll have to break the news to Margaret."

"Yes," said Harding. "You know she and Dick had had a tiff, but had made it up; and I suppose she'll take it hard."

Everett said nothing, but thought to himself: "Yes, she'll make a lot of noise, but her grief won't last long. I'll bet even money she'll set her cap at old Estrada and marry him inside the year. She is not like Violet Harding. If Wesley had gone, she'd have crumpled up for good."

As they were approaching Tres Pinos, Harding said:

"It would be a hell of a joke if that damned Eusebio lived!"

"He has not got a chance," said Everett. "My forty-five hit him just over the heart."

But Harding was gone. He had cantered on to break the news to Mrs. Ladbrook.

When they reached the hacienda, Everett's eyes were greeted by the sight of the three black-coated Mescalien chiefs, Carlos, Estrada, and Henriquez, sharply defined against its white walls.

Before he had time to dismount, they descended the steps of the veranda to greet him. He leaped from his horse, and accepted unmoved the congratulations of the three men. Their manner was most hearty, and they were full of compliments; but, with it all, Everett felt a certain frigidity and reserve on their part. He was

not altogether shocked, therefore, when on reaching the veranda, Carlos touched his arm and said:

"It must have been a great fight, but it's too bad that you had to kill and wound so many of the young men of our prominent families. I'm afraid this may cause trouble in the future."

Everett, who knew well the shifty character of the men with whom he had to deal, smiled grimly and said:

"I'm sorry, Carlos. Perhaps it would have been better had I not carried out to the letter the plans which you made with me. Perhaps you would be more pleased if those young *haciendados* had ridden here in force, to take tea with you in your house."

"No, no," said Carlos; "don't misunderstand me. I'm an old soldier, and know you have to break eggs to make an omelet; but I am, after all, a patriot and hate to shed my countrymen's blood."

"Hell!" said Everett. "Don't make me laugh."

Estrada held himself slightly aloof and watched the conversation between his companions; but Henriquez, on hearing Carlos's last words, joined in.

"Yes, Everett," he said, "I'm sorry, too. My wife is dreadfully upset. Two of our cousins are badly wounded here inside."

Everett looked at him quietly and said:

"Your criticism at least is just, Henriquez. I made a great mistake in having any wounded at all."

Estrada then stepped forward and said:

"Everett, forgive my countrymen. I work for the future of my beloved country, and know that sorrow always attends the footsteps of progress. I accept your

work as being perfect and congratulate you without reservation."

They passed through the heavily-carved mahogany portal, and, turning to the left, entered the large dining-room, now the operating-theater.

The two surgeons and their orderlies were working briskly and did not lack assistance. The good-will and adaptability of the cowboys, untired by the short day's work, had led them to offer their aid; and though the work was rough, it was expeditious and fairly sanitary.

They passed from the operating-room into the parlors, where the American wounded and the young *haciendados* were being treated with special attention.

Here Violet Harding was in active charge, and one could see the good effect of her whole-hearted and quiet service. Mrs. Henriquez was acting as her aid, but devoting herself entirely to her wounded compatriots. These, although grateful for her attentions, never took their eyes off the fair American, whose graceful presence seemed an anodyne to their pain. Mrs. Ladbroke was not to be seen.

Everett went on to continue his inspection, accompanied by the three Mescalier leaders, who appeared unable to leave him alone for a moment, as if they recognized in him their veritable chief.

As he reached the veranda, its straw-covered surface crowded from end to end with wounded *Rurales*, Harding came toward him.

"Well," he said, "I broke the news to Margaret. She is howling up-stairs with Mrs. Carlos, who is trying to calm her. The old lady is keen to get to work among

the wounded, but she feels it her duty to soothe Margaret's hysterics."

"Well, that's all right," said Everett, coolly. "It's worked out as I thought. She'll get over it, and mighty quick, too; but we've got to have Mrs. Carlos show herself to these young *haciendados*, and now is the time for her to do it." Then, with a scarcely concealed smile, he turned to Estrada and said: "Now, President, you have a little work to do. Go and tell Mrs. Ladbroke that she became a widow in a glorious cause."

Estrada needed no further word of encouragement, and bounded away.

Then, turning to Carlos, Everett said:

"Now this end of the game seems going well, but we can't waste time playing pity and politics. Let's get a quiet spot and work out our plans for licking Obregon."

Carlos clapped his hands. Two servants answered his call, and in a trice the straw was cleared away from a corner of the veranda, a table and chairs were placed there, an oil-lamp lit against the fading light; and surrounded by the wounded, to the music of popping champagne corks, Everett and Carlos set to work upon the plans for the great battle.

It was none too easy working it out amid such surroundings. Their table was placed near the door leading into the operating-room, through which was carried a constant stream of litters laden with the more severely wounded. Rough soldiers as they were and hardened to such sights, neither Carlos nor Everett could resist noticing these men. Most were fairly quiet, but now

and then a young *hacendado*, maddened by pain, would curse them as he was borne past.

One did so with such vehemence that they gave him more than a passing look; and, in doing so, caught sight of another litter borne close behind. On this lay Don Eusebio, his eyes closed, his hands clenched. He breathed with difficulty. On his breast lay his gilt-decked sombrero, which rose and fell with his panting breath.

Both Carlos and Everett rose to their feet and accompanied the stricken leader into the operating-room. Attention was given him at once. The surgeons shook their heads as they examined the hole above his heart. There was nothing to be done, and he was made as comfortable as possible in the parlor where his comrades lay.

As yet he had spoken no word, but when Mrs. Harding leaned over him, he opened his eyes and beckoned her to bend low.

"Is Margaret here?" he whispered. "I am dying. It can do no harm. Let me say good-by."

The womanly heart of Violet was touched. She nodded.

"Have courage," she said. "Wait." She ran in search of her country-woman.

On the way she met Mrs. Carlos and told her quest, and together they mounted the stairs and entered the room where Mrs. Ladbroke lay. Her hysteria had passed, and her eyes were closed. Beside her sat Estrada, holding her hand, which he was stroking gently.

Violet hesitated a moment, and a quick flush passed

over her pale face. Then, going to the bed, she motioned Estrada aside and throwing herself upon her knees, took Margaret's hand:

"Be brave, my dear! I know your loss is terrible, but you must not give in. Come below and help us. The wounded, the living, need you. Be brave, dear, and come!"

Margaret opened her eyes and slowly shook her head.

Violet leaned forward and whispered in her ear:

"Come! You must. Eusebio is dying. He asks to see you to say good-by."

Margaret rose to a sitting posture, and, waving her hands feebly, cried:

"This is too much! I cannot."

"You must," said Violet. So saying, she placed her arm around Margaret's waist, and with Mrs. Carlos's aid drew her to her feet and led her, still protesting, down-stairs.

The sight of the wounded seemed to stab her into life. She looked wildly about her and crying:

"Where is he?" ran forward unaided.

With difficulty the women overtook her, and led her quietly to the cot on which Eusebio lay, and then turned away their heads.

Margaret, now fully alive to the situation, threw herself upon her knees, and, grasping Eusebio's hand, breathed his name.

The dying man opened his eyes, pressed her fingers gently, and smiled. He panted for breath, and then said:

“You told me to find you. I am here.”

His eyes closed, and with a little shudder he lay dead.

Margaret fell fainting by the cot.

CHAPTER XX

OBREGON'S departure from Aldaban occurred at almost the very moment that Eusebio's force met its crushing defeat, thirty-five miles away, near Tres Pinos. Though his army lacked the intense mobility of the Hualtecos, it moved at an admirable rate of speed. The infantry, lightly laden, their feet shod with leather sandals, kept easy pace with the cavalry and artillery. They marched for five hours. The sunlight had long faded, and a starlit night had taken its place before he made a halt.

Here was situated one of his own haciendas, and he made it his headquarters. The old house was surrounded by many acres of almost treeless grazing land, where were fed the largest of his herds. He gave orders that enough should be slaughtered to feed his men, and for the rest to be driven forward with the army when it resumed its march in three hours.

He threw out a cavalry screen, and, accompanied by his aides, entered the hacienda and cast himself, fully clothed, upon a couch. He fell asleep at once.

Indians, like some wild animals, are never so alert as when apparently buried in deep slumber. A certain sixth sense—call it apprehension if you will—seems to stand guard over them, and before approaching danger has come near enough to arouse the other five, this sixth

sense stirs the sleeper like a tolling bell, and he passes instantly into perfect wakefulness.

So it was with Obregon. He moved uneasily in his sleep, then rose to a sitting posture, every sense on the qui vive, and listened intently.

He heard the whinnying of a horse, the shuffling footsteps of a sentry pacing to and fro on the veranda. On a table in the middle of the room an oil-lamp burned low. Around the table, seated in chairs, all sound asleep, their heads pillowed in their arms, sat four of his generals and his two personal aides. No danger seemed to threaten.

He rose to his feet, walked to the veranda, and gazed out into the night. As far as he could see, his eyes met gleaming fires, which made the night darker. At these fires his troops were cooking the freshly killed beef, working without cries or noise of any kind, in that silent, ghostly fashion peculiar to the Indian and impossible for men of European races.

He looked at his watch. An hour and a half had passed since he had reached the hacienda. He drew a long breath, and stretched his arms over his head. As he did so, the silence was broken by the low rattle of several carbine-shots coming from the north.

"Those are my advanced posts," he said to himself. "What can have happened to Eusebio?"

He turned and woke the sleeping officers with a shout. They sprang to their feet.

"You aides mount at once and ride to the cavalry outpost and bring me news of what's happening there." Then turning to General Baldameo Gueren, who com-

manded the cavalry, a tall, very fat man of about his own age, his face deeply pitted with small-pox and his one eye gleaming like a live coal over his enormous white mustache, he said: "'Limber up two batteries and point them toward the north.'"

He said to another:

"This is probably a false alarm. Let the men stand to arms where they are, but go on with their cooking."

Then the old man shrugged his shoulders, and, with hands clasped behind his back, paced slowly up and down the veranda.

The carbine-shots had ceased. Near at hand the shouting of the artillery officers could be heard as the two batteries swung into position. By the light of the fires he could see the infantry quietly falling into line.

Minutes passed, and then the clatter of hoofs broke upon his ears, and a dozen horsemen came to an abrupt halt at the steps of the veranda. They dismounted, and the two aides whom he had sent forward approached, accompanied by officers of the Rurales, some *hacien-dados*, and two peons of the country-side.

Obregon led them into the parlor and took his seat upon the sofa. The new-comers saluted and remained standing before him. He turned first to the aides.

"Why were those shots fired?"

"Our cavalry is wide awake, Excellency; and not knowing who these men were, shot as they approached."

Obregon turned his head and, addressing a colonel of *Rurales*, said:

"Tell your story."

In a few words the story was told how they had met

the Hualtecos, five thousand strong, according to the narrator; how Eusebio's force had driven these men before them like chaff until, as if from nowhere, hundreds of machine-guns had opened fire, and from the bowels of the earth had sprung thousands of American cavalry. The battle had been terrific, and they had been overwhelmed by force of numbers. There were no signs of Eusebio. He was either dead or a prisoner, they were sure. Their losses had been heavy. At least one thousand men of the combined force of Rurales and *haciendados* were missing.

There had been no attempt at pursuit by the enemy. The survivors, many of whom were wounded, were coming on as fast as their tired horses would let them. They should be here by dawn. Those here had found fresh mounts, and had pushed on to bring the news. On the way they had been joined by the two peons who had word for the president.

One of these came forward and presented a note. It was signed by an old friend of Obregon's who lived between Tres Pinos and the pass in the Cordilleras, and announced the onward march of a vast number of Hualtecos infantry and the American cavalry. There was no mention of artillery.

Obregon raised his eyes to the colonel of the Rurales and asked sharply:

"You saw no infantry?"

"No, Excellency. Only cavalry."

"Where, exactly, did the battle take place?"

"Some miles this side of Tres Pinos. We could see the hill plainly."

"From what point did the Americans attack?"

"From the Cordilleras," replied the officer.

Obregon turned sharply to his aides.

"We shall stay here all night. Give those orders, and summon at once all of the generals."

He clapped his hands, and servants appeared.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, "make yourselves entirely at home and ask for what you want. Go and get needed rest."

CHAPTER XXI

SCHWARTZ, on leaving the president, hurried to the railway station, full of the importance of his mission and confident of success. He muttered to himself:

“Obregon is lucky to have a Prussian officer like me to help him in this crisis. I’ll make these lazy dogs jump, get the artillery up, and win Obregon’s battle for him. I’ll show these niggers what a German can do. With my good Krupp guns and my *schlimm* Prussian mind, I’ll win this country for the fatherland and make a vast fortune for myself. The kaiser will add a *von* to my name, and I will return to Berlin, enter the Reichstag, and become chief of the colonial office.”

As these thoughts passed through his mind he could hardly restrain himself, and despite the heat and the heavy, sandy road, he almost broke into a run. He reached the station dripping with perspiration and breathing with difficulty. He stopped for a moment, grateful for the cool shade of the veranda, and mopped his brow. Then, fired by fresh energy, he rushed into the waiting-room.

There was no one in sight. The telegraph office was empty, the ticket-office likewise. All was silent as the grave.

He ran hither and thither, and finally found a lesser employee asleep in the baggage-room. He shook him roughly. The man, still drunk after the night's orgy, looked at him stupidly, reeking with the fumes of pulque and mescal. Schwartz kicked him in his fury, and hurrying from the station, rushed to the round-house, where the two locomotives were kept.

There he had better luck. Against the wall were four men, squatting on their haunches, apparently sober, playing monte.

"Which of you is the engineer?" he shouted.

They looked up quietly, and went on with their game. He stamped his foot.

"Dogs! Donkeys! Pigs! How dare you sit before a Prussian officer?"

Uttering foul curses, he rushed upon them, his clenched fist high in air.

In a twinkling, and apparently in one movement, the four Mescalians rose from the ground, placed their backs against the wall, and fronted the infuriated German with a long knife in each right hand.

Schwartz's manner changed instantly. His clenched hand fell to his side, and his voice dropped almost to a whine:

"*Oiga, oiga, amigos.* I am the German banker Schwartz, and I have word from President Obregon."

He pulled the paper from his pocket and showed it to the men.

Watching him defiantly, with their shining knives clenched in their hands, the men spoke not a word. Schwartz pleaded with them in a really humble manner.

At length the eldest shrugged his shoulders, placed his knife in his belt, and said:

"I am the engineer, but I cannot read."

Schwartz ground his teeth; then, his common sense returning, he drew from his pocket a handful of gold pieces.

"You can read this," he said.

The men smiled and nodded.

"Now," said Schwartz, "this money is for you men. If you do as I tell you, and if you do it well, I'll give you double that sum.

"President Obregon has ordered me to go to Cruz Chico on a special mission, and I must go at once. I don't want a train. I want simply a locomotive. Fire up the better one of these two and take me to Cruz Chico."

The men whispered among themselves. Then the engineer said:

"Give us that money first, and we will do it; but give us also a paper to shield us if we get into trouble."

Schwartz did as requested, and the men worked with such a will that in a short time steam was up, and the locomotive, with two fuel-tenders attached and an extra fireman, pulled out of the round-house with Schwartz and his ambitions on board.

The run to Cruz Chico was made in three hours. Never had the miserable roadbed, the poorly laid rails, the badly graded curves of the little narrow-gage line, been put to such a severe test. Had it not been for the added steadiness given by the extra fuel-tender, the locomotive must many times have been in danger of

jumping the track. As it was, the wretched engine reeled and rocked like a small steamer bucking a heavy sea.

It was only once that they slackened speed, on passing the American construction camp this side of Cruz Chico, where the new track was being laid.

Schwartz glanced complacently at the group of rough buildings and muttered: "The damned Yankees will soon be either working for me or driven out of the country." His vision, dulled by his self-centered arrogance, failed to notice a solitary American who, as the locomotive passed, ran to a telephone on the veranda of one of the buildings.

Schwartz, black almost as his companions, shaken almost to a jelly, was, nevertheless, in good spirits, and he shouted with joy when, on nearing his destination, his dust-filled eyes caught sight of a ship slowly making the wharf—a ship from whose masthead fluttered the flag of his country.

"*Gott ist immer mit uns,*" he almost sobbed in his joy. Then he muttered, "And I'll soon have a glass of good German beer."

But his patriotic thirst was doomed to be unquenched, for hardly had the locomotive come to a stop at Cruz Chico station, when it was surrounded by some fifty Jamaica negroes, armed to the teeth, who grinned and shouted like monkeys as they threatened the new arrival with their weapons.

Schwartz was astounded. As usual, he began with bluster, but ended with a prayer. He begged to be allowed to pass.

From the doorway of the station Ellison and Baker, with another American, looked on, grinning, enjoying the comedy to the full.

At length Ellison spoke:

"Go and bring that *Dutchman* here, Baker. Don't be too rough. He is a rotten crook, but, after all, he is a white man, and we mustn't let the niggers touch him."

Nothing loath, Baker and his companion ran to the locomotive, and, helping Schwartz, none too gently, to descend from the cab, hustled him to where Ellison was standing.

Ellison greeted him with a grin and said:

"Why this black face make-up, Schwartz? It looks as if you were trying to hide that face of yours and make a get-away.

"Say, boys, let's frisk him. No *Deutsch* hog ever tries to beat it unless he's got his pocket full of dough."

Schwartz looked from one to the other. Shaken by his journey, shocked by his reception, it was with difficulty that he made one last effort to become dignified and protest in his usual blustering manner:

"How dare you, gentlemen! How dare you touch a German, a banker, and a Prussian officer! Take care what you do! Don't you see that a German ship is in the harbor, with the Imperial flag flying above it? And, besides, I am carrying orders from President Obregon."

The Americans grinned at his tirade, and when he finished, Ellison said:

"Let's have a look at those orders."

"They are not to be shown you," said Schwartz, arrogantly.

Ellison frowned.

"We can't waste any more time over this stiff. Tap him on the head, Baker, but don't kill him."

In a jiffy the man addressed whipped out his 45-Colt and brought the barrel sharply down upon the crown of the soft hat the German wore.

Schwartz took the count. He had hardly sunk to the ground before Ellison bent to his knees and rifled his pockets with a master hand. He soon came upon the order signed by Obregon.

"Now, boys, get some niggers to carry Schwartz to the office, gag him, bind him, and lock him in. Baker, leave some niggers to take charge of this engine, and march the others to where the rest of the coons are, and then wait for me at the barracks.

"Gosh! This paper comes in the nick of time. It's an order to bearer and has no name on it. With it Robledo will have no difficulty in accepting and even signing for the Krupp guns, and we'll all have plenty of good German beer to-night."

CHAPTER XXII

OBREGON'S hacienda was built on a small hill situated in about the middle of the plateau, and from its solid flat roof, two stories above the ground, an excellent view was to be had in all directions.

The president decided to fight his battle here, where he could deploy his troops immediately under his eyes. His plans were quickly made. He placed his heavy artillery in a half-circle about the hacienda, facing the north. He extended his infantry line on each side until, on the left, they reached the base of the Cordilleras, and on the right, the point where the plateau dipped into the wooded low-lands. He reinforced each wing with what he had of mountain-guns and light artillery. The two thousand cavalry, with the exception of a few troops employed as outposts, he kept in the rear of the hacienda to be used as occasion offered.

Before dawn all his dispositions were made, and he and his staff made themselves comfortable upon the flat roof. Chairs and tables were placed there, and men with field-glasses stood upon the breast-high parapet which surrounded it, their eyes fixed on the north.

On all sides stretched open pasture-lands, dotted here and there with clumps of large trees, and frequently cut by small streams flowing from the Cordilleras,

Four miles to the north, a dark line crossing the plateau told of a forest. It was from here the enemy must come, and upon this line the field-glasses of the watchers were fixed.

Obregon counted mainly on his artillery. He was certain of their fidelity and of the loyalty of their leader, General Baldameo Gueren. He was not so sure of his infantry, but he hoped they would prove faithful. He had harangued their officers in his best manner, and had promised them large rewards of land and money if they should win the day.

Just as dawn was breaking the watchers announced troops coming from the north.

Prearranged signals were sent along the lines, and all was soon in readiness for an attack. The oncomers, however, proved to be Eusebio's beaten force.

The arrival of these horses and men, too exhausted to be of service, did more harm than good; for in the tale of their defeat, which passed like lightning among the soldiery, the numbers of the enemy were greatly exaggerated. They were, they said, opposed not only by well-armed Hualtecos, but by thousands of American devils who had hundreds of machine-guns.

Obregon did his best to check these tales, and to counteract their effect ordered barrels of fiery mescal to be served at once to the entire army.

Obregon felt that the newcomers were more to be feared for the moment than the enemy. At all cost they must be prevented from reaching his base, the capital, Aldaban, and from spreading the bad news. To this

end he made them dismount, and scatter their tired horses over the pastures in the rear of the hacienda.

It was nine o'clock before the first action took place. In this engagement the small cavalry outposts fired only a few rounds, and galloped up with the news of the enemy's advance. They reported that they had been attacked by a larger number of Hualtecos, but had seen no Americans.

Obregon gave no sign. An hour passed; then the watchers could descry a long line of infantry advancing at a rapid pace against them. After an interval another line appeared, and again another. On the enemy's left flank marched some fifty horses, but on their right, at the base of the Cordilleras, moved a large force of cavalry.

Now Obregon signaled to get ready. The mescal had taken effect, and this time the word was received with some show of enthusiasm.

Obregon turned to General Gueren.

"The cunning devils are giving us a bad target," he said, "but drop some shells among the horsemen on the flanks."

His order was obeyed. The cannon coughed, and black smoke rose in the still air; but the aim was wretched, puffs of dust rising from the ground far from the objectives.

Obregon frowned.

"Bad work, Gueren. Better wait till they get closer."

"I'll do the best I can, Excellency," replied his old friend, "but our guns are wretched. We have only a little ammunition, and many of the shells are bad; but

I think we have enough to hold these devils until Robledo and Schwartz come with the Krupp guns. Las Palmas is only five miles away, and if that German has half worked, they should be here at almost any moment."

"You're right," said Obregon. "We must get up the Krupps."

Turning to an aide, he ordered him to send fifty of the cavalry, with all the wagons procurable, to Las Palmas to rush forward the German cannon and ammunition in all haste.

Now the small artillery on each flank opened fire on the cavalry groups advancing against them, but the wretched aim and the defective shells seemed to produce no effect whatever, except that the larger force of cavalry advancing close to the base of the Cordilleras seemed to march in more open order.

Obregon now ordered Gueren to concentrate the fire of the heavy artillery on the first line of the enemy's infantry. Occasionally a shell caused damage, but the movement was in no way checked, the Hualtecos closing the gaps and, if anything, increasing the speed of their advance. Obregon swore.

"Don't waste any more shells, Gueren. Wait till they get within three hundred yards, and then fire point-blank."

Obregon paced the roof nervously for a few moments, and then, turning to Gueren, said:

"You take charge here. I must stop their cavalry, or they'll outflank us. Those mountain-guns seem to have no effect. If your artillery is not effective at

point-blank range, order the infantry to charge. The men are fresh, and the mescal has put courage into their hearts."

So saying, he left the roof, mounted a beautiful black charger, and with the cavalry rode slowly behind his infantry lines toward the hills. His men cheered him as he passed. He responded by waving his plumed hat and shouting words of encouragement.

He soon increased his speed to a canter and reached the extreme left flank of his army while the opposing cavalry was still five hundred yards away. He formed his men in two lines and took his place in the center of the first.

He could now easily recognize the Americans, whose line formed the center of the front of the opposing force. Obregon's face flushed red. His years slipped from him. He raised himself in his stirrups, waved his saber vigorously in the air, and shouted:

"Death to the gringos! Fight for your homes! Charge!"

His men leaped forward with a roar. This was answered by a ringing rebel yell and the wild cries of the Hualtecos.

The opposing forces closed, but before they met, the rattle of the Colt revolvers dominated the thunder of hoofs and the shouting of the partizans. It was six-gun against saber, lead against steel, and the issue was in doubt only for seconds of time. Nothing could stand before the revolvers of the Americans. It was a massacre. The survivors broke and fled. Among the

first to fall had been Obregon and his beautiful black charger.

The Americans had lost not a man. The charge successful, Everett halted his men and faced the left flank of the enemy. He ordered the Hualtecos cavalry, without leaving their saddles, to pour a rapid fire from their carbines into the enemy's flank; and while this was going on, he told the Americans to reload their revolvers. The enemy infantry, seeing Obregon's defeat, seemed paralyzed. Even the mountain-artillerymen made no move. The revolvers of the Americans were now loaded, and Everett was on the point of ordering his entire force to charge when Carlos, who had been studying the enemy's line with his glasses, said:

"Stop a moment! These regiments near us are commanded by my friends. Wait! I'll show myself and shout to them."

Then without hesitation he spurred his horse into a canter, and, waving his hat from side to side, shouted:

"Surrender! I am your friend, General Carlos!"

Everett marveled at his courage, but Carlos had measured his risk and took it like a man. His action was a master stroke. As the Mescalians regulars recognized their former chief they threw down their arms. Shouts of "Viva Carlos!" rent the air. The cry passed along the line, growing in strength till it broke like a wave against the hacienda, and drowned the hopes of General Gueren and the staff gathered there.

Gueren shrugged his shoulders like the brave fatalist he was. He felt his chief must have fallen, and one thought, to avenge him, filled his soul. The first line

of Hualtecos was now within three hundred yards. He ordered his artillery to fire point-blank. He smiled grimly as he saw the execution, but the onward move of the Hualtecos was unchecked.

Fate closes the eyes of doomed men, and he had not given real thought to the little band of fifty horse on the Hualtecos' left flank. These had, a few moments before, disappeared in a large clump of trees not four hundred yards away, and now from that point a monotonous rattle and an ever-increasing stream of bullets bespoke the fact that the American machine-guns had come into action.

Gueren saw his gunners falling by their pieces, and filled with fury, he dashed below to take charge of a last desperate rally. His body was found not ten feet from the door of the hacienda. The battle was won.

A little rough work still went on, however. It was hard to check the enthusiasm of the Hualtecos, but Everett, directly he saw the success of Don Carlos's manœuver, rode at full speed along the Hualtecos front, and with the aid of their chiefs checked their advance.

Now was the crucial moment in the whole campaign, the moment for the Americans to show their training, their influence, and their decency. Had they been absent, the Hualtecos would have had no pity for the Mescalians, would have swept into Aldaban and put that town to fire and sword.

Carlos proved his mettle, too. Remember, he was the hereditary chief of the Hualtecos. He quickly saw that what his wild men wished was immediate plunder. He must give them something and at once. So he gave

them what he had to give, all the arms of the enemy, an artillery, heavy and light, sabers and carbines; all except the arms of the two infantry regiments devoted to him. These he kept armed to police Aldaban.

The cheers with which this gift was received died away when he told the Hualtecos that the carbines they held in their hands belonged to him and the Mescalian Government. But the touch of plunder softens the hardest hand; so, clutching their new-won prizes, the simple savages, like many wise humans, exchanged the substance for the shadow and were content. Carlos now dominated the situation, and placed Obregon's army under the charge of the colonels of the regiments friendly to him.

The change from war to peace is often like the sound of the last trump: it takes place in the twinkling of an eye. In this case Carlos proved himself a true magician, and waved a magic wand when he gave orders for all Obregon's cattle to be slaughtered to make a feast of blood brotherhood. Soldiers are really the most animal of humans. They are dominated by their stomach, and around the fires where the fat beasts were being cooked strife was forgotten, and almost friendship reigned between the opposing forces.

Word had been sent at once to Estrada and Henriquez who, with a small bodyguard, were waiting in the forest five miles away, that the battle was decided.

Then Carlos rode up and down the lines and told the men that their chief Obregon was dead and that their new chief, Don Emilio Estrada, was coming to

see them, and that they must cheer him one and all. Never were such cheers heard in Mescalita.

As the old clock in the hacienda was ringing out the chimes for noon Estrada and Henriquez arrived. Carlos greeted them with enthusiasm. Everett clasped their hands in silence, then turned to withdraw, when Harding stepped forward and said:

"President, this is the minute for you to make the first speech agreed upon, and I want it made now. We have fresh horses. It will be carried to the telephone line at a gallop, and it will be flashed round the world that you are the new President of Mescalita."

Till this moment Everett had appeared to be the dominant force among the Americans and, in fact, of the whole enterprise. Now, the battle won, the soldier retired, and the banker spoke.

At Harding's words Estrada flushed; but dominated by the cold gaze of Harding's blue eyes, he bowed abruptly and said:

"All right. Where do I make it?"

"Right here," said Harding. "From the roof of the hacienda." Then, turning to Everett and Don Carlos, he added: "Bring up the whole force right under the walls. Put in front the regiments friendly to you, General Carlos; and, Everett, keep the Americans out of this."

Then he called Estrada to one side and placed in his hands a sheet of paper.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHILE Harding and Estrada were conferring, Carlos and Everett left the roof and went into the huge parlor of the hacienda.

"Well done, Carlos," said Everett. "How is your appetite? I'm as hungry as a bear. Remember I am younger than you are. While the men are eating, why shouldn't we have a snack?"

Carlos, seated in an easy-chair, seemed lost in thought as his eyes wandered about the room, taking in every detail of its luxury and comfort. He said to himself, "I think this ought to be mine."

Everett spoke sharply.

"Are you deaf, General? I said I was hungry."

Carlos felt his dream coming true. He nodded to Everett, and clapped his hands as Obregon had done a few hours before. Servants appeared, and he ordered luncheon to be served at once.

Now Harding and Estrada, accompanied by Henriquez, appeared, and in a few moments dinner was announced. They rose to enter the dining-room when Everett stopped them with a gesture and said:

"Gentlemen, we are all winners here. So let us throw aside caste for once. Why not have the Hualtecos chieftains eat with us?"

Estrada frowned. Henriquez struck his hand upon his thigh and said:

"You Americans are too democratic. Those men would not feel at ease with us. Eh, Don Carlos?"

"You are right," replied the general. "I don't think they would; and, besides, they are needed to keep their men quiet."

"As you like," said Everett, "but it seems to me damned hard to make this country a real democracy." Then he touched Harding on the shoulder:

"If our friends are so bent upon formality, I'd like to know which of them is to take the head of the table."

Carlos looked sharply at Estrada.

"I think I'll take this hacienda, Emilio," he said. "It would please the Hualtecos to know that their chieftain was to live in Obregon's house. So, if you don't mind, I shall take the head of the table. You, as president, will sit upon my right, and Henriquez upon my left, that is, if our American friends do not object to this arrangement."

Harding smiled.

"I guess, as long as Everett and I get something to eat, we don't care where we sit."

There was plenty to eat, and the native servants, with their impassive faces, served the meal as well and as naturally as if their master had not been killed a few moments before.

When the luncheon was finished and while coffee was being served, a rap was heard upon the door, and a Mescalitan captain of a regiment friendly to General Carlos entered the room. He saluted, and then an-

nounced that the body of President Obregon was being brought to the hacienda, and asked what he should do with it.

Carlos told him to step outside for a moment, and then, turning to Estrada, asked:

"What shall we do with it? I don't suppose you want a big funeral service to mar the joy of our entry into Aldaban."

"No," said Estrada, "I do not. We'll bury it here. There are priests with the Mescalian troops."

"Just a moment, President," said Carlos. "I intend to live here, and I don't want Obregon's spirit to haunt this house. He died as a soldier. Let us bury him where he fell, in the foot-hills; and while we are about it, we'll bury his old friend Gueren with him, and the other officers of the artillery who died at their guns."

Estrada waved his hand.

"Just as you will."

Harding then spoke, looking quietly at the three Mescalians.

"It's a matter of indifference to me where you bury the brave old man, but I insist upon one thing, and that is that you, Estrada, make your speech from the roof of the house before the funeral ceremony; for I am in a hurry to get this news to New York. Have you got your speech straight, Estrada?"

Estrada frowned.

"Indeed I have. I wish there was a stenographer here to take it down. What you want me to say, Harding, I can say in a few words; but I intend this speech

to be a masterpiece. I have waited long enough for the chance of making it."

"Now, now, Estrada," said Harding, "this is no time for fireworks. After a few weeks you can talk as you like, but not in this speech, or in the next one which you are to make in Aldabam, are you to let yourself go. That is understood. You can use your own language, but you've got to say what I have written and devilish little more. I give you five minutes to talk, and when I stamp my foot I want you to stop."

Carlos smiled and said:

"I am with you, Harding. As an old soldier, it always seems to me the least said, the soonest mended." Then continuing: "Now we'll go up on the roof, and I'll tell the captain to lay out Obregon's body, for the moment, in the parlor, and then bring the two friendly regiments to surround the hacienda. The men have had time enough to finish their meal."

Once on the roof, Estrada measured the width of the parapet with his hand, and finding it too narrow to stand upon safely, insisted that a solid table be brought, upon which he could make his harangue.

In a short time the friendly regiments took their places close beneath the walls of the hacienda. Behind them pressed the masses of Hualtecos and the rest of the Mescalian army.

Four machine-guns with their crews were placed upon the roof, and the rest of the machine-guns, together with the American cavalry, took up their stand about five hundred yards away.

Estrada leaped to the table, seized his wide-brimmed

black hat in his right hand, and waved it. While he did so, a bugle blew for silence. When its sharp music ceased, the new president began his speech.

He spoke slowly, distinctly, and with vigor. One could see that his voice carried well and that all heard him.

"Citizens, brothers, fellow-Mescalians: A great step toward liberty, equality, and prosperity has been taken to-day. For years I and my fellow-patriots have noticed with deep sorrow that the late President Obregon was falling more and more into the power and under the malign influence of the Germans, a race which has ever been and always will be our bitterest enemy.

"The Germans are a cold, cruel people. They live in a cold, harsh climate. Their minds are cruel, and they neither understand nor love us, the free, gallant, and noble citizens of this beautiful, sunny, warm, and kindly Mescalía. It was to free our glorious country from the German danger that this revolution was made. It was also made to prove that we are a civilized and broad-visioned race, fit to take our place among the highest nations of this world.

"In this revolution to prove the breadth of our vision we did not hesitate to call to our aid the Americans. They have not the same cold, cruel hearts of the Germans. They do not come from a far-distant and wintry land. They are citizens of this glorious continent of America on which we also live. The same waves beat upon our coasts and theirs. The same sun shines upon us both. The same breezes make rustle the leaves on the trees which adorn our soil, whether they be pine or

palm. They, the Americans, breathe the same glorious and free air, and in their hearts beats the same desire for liberty, freedom, and equality that forms the guiding star of our existence.

"These friends of ours, these brothers of ours, I may almost say these compatriots of ours, risked their own lives to purge our sacred soil from the German stain. Now that that is done, they will lay down their swords. Some will become our fellow-citizens, and others return to their glorious country with the knowledge that they have performed a brotherly act and helped to free their sister nation Mescalita from the menace of the brutal foreigner.

"I announce to you that I am your new president. Elections will be held soon after I reach Aldaban, but I feel confident in the result of those elections and that I will be chosen your new chief."

At this point the bugle sounded, and loud cheers burst from the assembled soldiery. The cries continued until another signal from the bugle produced silence.

Estrada went on:

"My policy, which I will carry out, and which, I feel sure, will be approved by you, for it will be supported by my fellow-patriots, General Carlos and Don Saturnino Henriquez——"

Again the bugle sounded, and again cheers, while the two chieftains leaped upon the table beside Estrada and waved their hats.

The bugle proclaimed silence, and Estrada continued:

"In freeing this our beloved land from the cursed

German, we have taken one great step; but I propose to take another.

"For years Mescalita has suffered from the heavy burden of a foreign debt placed upon it by President Obregon, largely at the solicitation of the Germans. I propose, in announcing my succession to President Obregon, to wipe out this debt, to announce to the world that at last we are a free country, and that we strike from our limbs the golden fetters which have bound us to Europe and made us Europe's slaves. I speak of the foreign bonds, the *bonos exteriores*, and I announce that I, as your president, repudiate them, together with their interest as yet happily unpaid, now and for all time.

"Brothers, you have heard my words. They should cheer your hearts, for they must bring to you relief and happiness. Now, as brothers, we will march together to Aldaban not as conquerors, but as bearers of glad tidings and great joy, to announce that peace reigns, and that with it, forever, shall exist liberty, equality, and prosperity for all."

Estrada bowed profoundly, and this time no bugle was needed to produce waves of cheers.

When Estrada leaped from the table, Harding was the first to clasp his hand.

"Well done, Don Emilio! That was a daisy speech. You noticed I did not stop you. I let you run five minutes overtime. You're all right. Isn't he, Bill?"

"Yes, indeed," said Everett. "That speech was a corker. We've picked a sure winner this time, and if you keep up that kind of talk, Mr. President, you'll have no trouble in governing Mescalita."

Estrada, mopping his brow with a large colored handkerchief, could not conceal his joy at the Americans' praise; but tears stood in his eyes when Carlos and Henriquez, who had restrained themselves with difficulty while the Americans were speaking, threw their arms vehemently about his neck and kissed his cheeks again and again.

While the Mescalians were thus engaged, Harding said to Everett:

"Quick now, Bill. Send the news by fast riders to the end of the telephone line. Let them take two extra horses per man and not spare them. We must shoot the speech at once to Wallace in New York."

"Now," said Estrada, "let's get the funeral over and march to Aldaban. We should get there before dark."

The funeral ceremony was short, but lacked nothing in decency. Small detachments of Americans and Hualtecos, and all the Mescalian regiments, took part.

As they rode back to the hacienda, Estrada, turning to Carlos, said:

"What is your plan for the military entry into Aldaban? You know I leave that to you."

"My idea," said Carlos, "is that you enter, accompanied by the regiments friendly to me; with the American and Hualtecos cavalry and what is left of Don Eusebio's force, whom I have told to collect their horses, which must be now sufficiently rested,—also with a force of two thousand Hualtecos infantry, chosen from the different tribes. Linares will lead these. The rest of the Hualtecos infantry I will leave here in charge of

their chieftains. If all goes well, we should be able to send them back to their homes in a few days."

Henriquez broke in, saying:

"I don't see why you have any Hualtecos enter Aldaban. They'll only scare the citizens, and maybe put their backs up as well."

Estrada leaned forward and touched him on the arm.

"Now, Saturnino, my old friend," he said, "you must see that Carlos is right. Under my rule I want it known that the Hualtecos have as much right to come to Aldaban as any one else, and you see that Carlos doesn't bring them all in, but only enough to show that they had a part in the victory. It's the first time these brave fellows have ever seen the capital of their country. They'll be awed by it, and, I am sure, will give no trouble at all."

Carlos's face gleamed at these words. Henriquez shrugged his shoulders and said, with a smile:

"All right, but I am an old Spaniard, and this is a new deal for me."

Estrada then turned to Harding.

"Our victory must not make us forget the ladies or their brave part in it," he said. "I wish they could enter Aldaban with us, but it would be unwise to wait for them. We must send word of the victory to Tres Pinos at once, and, if they will leave the wounded, bring the ladies to Aldaban under a strong escort."

"All right," said Harding. "I'll send Bollard with some American and Hualtecos horse, if that suits you, Don Carlos."

"Perfectly," said the latter.

Harding turned to give the necessary orders, when Estrada flushed and said:

"Wait a moment, please."

He drew a pad from his pocket and wrote a hurried note, which he gave to Harding, saying:

"Please see that Mrs. Ladbrook gets this."

Everett bit his lips and winked at Harding.

Messengers were at once despatched to the capital, announcing the victory of Estrada, his assumption of the presidency until duly elected, and orders were given that business should go on as usual. The inhabitants were assured that there was no fear of disorder, and the entry of the victorious patriots would take place before dark.

Though there had been no revolution in Mescalita since Obregon had achieved power twenty years before, nevertheless the inhabitants of Aldaban received the news of their president's defeat and of the oncoming of the victors with the surprising quiet found only in people of Spanish blood—that blood which still flows with the fatalistic calm of their Arab ancestors, and gives its possessors their great daring in times of crisis, but also makes them accept whatever happens as if it had been long foreordained.

The entry into Aldaban took place without the slightest untoward incident. It was not yet night, but the sun, long hidden behind the Cordilleras, gave only a half-light. It seemed a veritable twilight of the gods—the death of Obregon and the old-time Spanish rule, and the birth of a new era.

As the victorious patriots approached the town, they

were met by the mayor, chief of police, and other officials, and in order to go through the necessary formalities of this meeting, implying as it did the delivery of the town into the victors' hands, a halt was made at the very review-ground where, only a short time before, Obregon had held the review of the forces about to set forth to protect him and his interests.

The stay there was short, but long enough to prove to the representatives of Aldaban that they had to deal with a real conqueror and all opposition would be vain. The officials needed only a glance to know that about Estrada were clustered two of the best regiments of infantry; and their eyes quivered for a moment when they saw, drawn up side by side, the American and the Hualtecoc horse.

Estrada, showing a real delicacy of sentiment, sent word to Obregon's widow, Donna Elvira, that he begged her to continue to make use of the palace until such time as his formal election would give him the right to enter it. This invitation Donna Elvira refused and, leaving the palace, took up her residence in Don Eusebio's home.

The column moved slowly through the streets and came to a halt in front of Estrada's home. Entering this, accompanied by Carlos and Henriquez, he quickly appeared upon the balcony, from which point of vantage the leaders received the cheers of the army and the populace. Short speeches were made, in which calm and quiet were enjoined, and again liberty and prosperity were promised. The little ceremony over, the

army and the crowd disappeared in the growing darkness.

Until now the Americans and Hualtecos had kept together largely from a sense of self-protection, feeling themselves to be somewhat unwelcome visitors to Aldaban; but the time had come to separate.

Everett clasped the hand of Linares and said:

"*Amigo*, it is understood that you and I stick together, whatever happens; and though we must separate, we'll keep in touch, for our camping-places will never be far apart."

"No fear, Don Guillermo. We've started this little show as comrades, and we'll see it through together; but I haven't the slightest fear of trouble. I know these Mescalians, and they know when they've had enough. They'll make no fuss. My Hualtecos are children and will be as quiet as lambs. I don't envy you your job, though; for your mob is of a very different kind."

They parted.

In the evening Harding and Everett retired to the rear room with Watson, Bogan, and Bill of the American force. Harding spoke of their contract and assured them that it would be fulfilled, and asked them about their plans.

Watson of the Diamond A, who had just swallowed a drink of rye-whisky, brushed the drops from his long, gray mustache and said:

"Well, gents, I guess I can speak for almost all the Arizona outfit. There is about fifty of 'em miners, and they're willing to stay and prospect a bit. The rest

of us want our pay, and we want go home, of course when the job is finished. The air here ain't dry enough for us boys; the country is too much like a damned garden. Where we come from, it takes seven acres to raise a cow, and we're proud of it. We understood that transportation home was fixed up in advance. We ain't in no special hurry, but I guess we'll all be glad to get home. That's all I've got to say, I guess."

Harding looked inquiringly from Bell to Bogan. The former coughed and said:

"I guess General Everett knows how I and most of the Indian Territory boys are fixed. We ain't like the Arizona outfit, and we ain't in no hurry to go home. In fact, most of us came here to settle down and try and make a stake. Speaking for myself, I'd like a little ranch, and, when it gets started, to bring down my wife and kids. We live hard at home, and this country looks good to me. I guess I can speak for most of my boys, but I ain't sure. I'll go through the crowd, and those who want to go home I'll turn over to Mr. Watson here, if he'll be so kind as to take 'em with him."

Harding nodded.

"Now, Bogan, what have you got to say? I understand that you belong to a little private bunch of four, three of whom are badly wounded back at Tres Pinos. What do you want to do?"

Bogan grinned.

"I guess we'll fall in with Jim Bell; that is, if he don't mind having some of the tough bunch tied to him. This country looks good enough to me, and I guess it does to the other boys. If we're treated right and not

hounded by anybody." He turned to Everett and added: "I guess that means, General, that you'll have to give us a little protection. We'll try to settle down, too, and give the good-citizen game a fair chance."

Harding turned to Everett, who had not moved or even looked up during the conversation.

"Now, Bill," he said, "this was really your job asking these questions; but I did it because, as you know, I handle the pay-roll, and I thought I'd let the boys know that they were sure of a fair deal as far as I was concerned."

Everett raised his head.

"I'm glad you spoke, Wesley. I'm sure the boys have confidence in me, but it does not hurt them to know that they are not only sure to get their pay, but, as long as they behave themselves, those who wish to stay here will have better than an even break. But I am still the leader of these men, and so I am going to put in my word.

"To-morrow I want to move the whole bunch out of town into some comfortable camp, where we can live our own lives. Of course the boys will have leave to come into town for twenty-four hours, about a hundred at a time. I suppose there will be some parades, and we'll do our best to make a good, quiet show in them; but, if I know the mob, the less parade work there will be, the better."

"You're right there," said Watson.

"Now does anybody want to say anything?" asked Everett.

The three men shook their heads.

"All right. One more drink, and we'll say good night," Everett said.

When the men had left, Harding got into communication with Cruz Chico by telegraph. Ellison explained to him that he had the Krupp guns in his possession, and that before he cut the cable he had got hold of the Krupp agent and, ostensibly as a favor, had let him wire to his chief that the shipment had fallen into the hands of Obregon's enemies and would be used against him, but that Krupp need not fear for his payment. He added that he had made such a good job in cutting the cable that it would take at least three days to repair it.

Harding turned to Everett.

"Well, there is bad as well as good luck in this," he said. "The good luck is that the Germans know that their artillery play has failed and that Schwartz and his crowd are beaten. Therefore they won't try to hang on to the foreign bonds. The bad luck is that it will be hard to keep Estrada from making another speech until the cable is repaired. His first speech in Aldaban is of the greatest importance to us, and must be cabled to New York as soon as it is made. What he says after that speech is of no importance. I'll bet he's busy writing the stuff now. We'll have to go to him at once, and by threats and cajolery keep him quiet until we are ready. We must strike while he's still a little grateful to us, for if we wait three days, he's sure to get a swelled head."

"I'm sure you're right, Wesley," said Everett, "but

you've got to leave me out of this. It's up to you to play the political end."

Harding, as he had thought, needed all his firmness and eloquence to prevent Estrada from making not only one speech, but a series of them. However, Harding had his way, and the three days were spent not in parades, jollification, and speech-making, but in organizing the government. This was done without the slightest difficulty, and Estrada, Carlos, and Henriquez proved themselves equal to the occasion.

On the evening of the third day Ellison sent word that the cable was repaired; so arrangements were made for a great celebration on the morrow. From early dawn crowds began to gather before the palace; bands played continually, and the natives of Aldaban prepared themselves for the really serious work of their lives—amusement.

The regular troops faithful to General Carlos lined the square. Neither the American force nor the Hualtecots were present.

At nine o'clock the three Mescalians leaders, together with Harding and Everett, met in Obregon's office in the palace. General Carlos was in full uniform. Both Estrada and Henriquez wore black frock-coats and silk hats. Their dark-skinned hands were covered by light yellow gloves. Estrada held a paper in his left hand. His moving lips showed that he was memorizing its contents, and occasionally he waved his right arm to emphasize some phrase.

Harding looked at his watch.

"Have you got your speech, Don Emilio?"

"I'll have it in a moment," was the reply. "Don't hurry me."

"I don't want to," replied Harding; "but I want the cable containing your speech to reach New York by noon, if possible."

At length Estrada rose.

"I am ready," he said.

Carlos went first to the balcony and waved his hat. Cheers broke forth, and before they ceased, Estrada took his place at the general's right hand. The band struck up the national air, and cheer upon cheer arose. Before they had ceased, Harding exchanged glances with Henriquez, and then Harding said:

"Now, Saturnino, take your position on Emilio's right hand and keep your eye on him. Don't let him change a word of his talk."

Henriquez joined the others on the balcony, and Harding lit a cigarette and pulled out his watch.

The music and the cheers had ceased, and Harding could hear the rolling and sonorous voice of Estrada. The first phrases meant but little. They were dominated by the magic words, "liberty, unity, prosperity, peace, equality," and the rest of the time-worn formulæ; but soon Estrada checked the torrent of his eloquence, and Harding put his hand to his ear. This is what he heard:

"Now, fellow-citizens, fellow-patriots, and beloved Mescalians, a new era has dawned full of promise. At length we have shaken off the shackles of the cursed foreigner, and can look the world in the face as only a free people can. We at length stand upon our own feet, and shall do so henceforth and forever.

"I say we are free from foreign domination, but that does not mean that we are free to sully our honor by any act which may make us unworthy to take our stand among the free nations of this earth. Baleful as has been the foreign—and by this I mean the German—influence, yet in yielding to it through the weakness of our governors, we have assumed certain obligations which, should we repudiate them, would prove us to be unworthy of the name of Mescalians.

"I know that you are honorable people and that you choose me as your president because I am an honorable man. As such I feel it my duty to announce that all debts incurred by the late President Obregon must be met in full, cost what it may. Among those debts are the foreign bonds, together with all back interest, which, my fellow-countrymen, though weighing heavily upon our shoulders, must be cheerfully borne because they are a debt of honor.

"To people of our Spanish race only one word speaks to our hearts—the word honor; and though loving liberty to the limit of our beings, the music which reaches our innermost heart, tolled by the bells of the ages, speaks honor and honor alone.

"From now on this country will be governed by the laws of freedom and justice, and every step will be taken to avoid foreign indebtedness. Should we, however, need further financial aid, we shall turn not to the distant and cold nations of Europe, but to our warm-hearted neighbors, the Americans, who will assist us without robbing us, and who will guide us without

checking the noble instincts which animate our every action."

When Harding caught the closing words of the last sentence, he looked at his watch and said: "Nine-thirty." Handing Everett a paper, he added, "Now, Bill, rush this to Ellison at Cruz Chico, and on to New York."

Estrada continued speaking, and stopped only when he was physically exhausted. The crowd, who had, as usual, paid not the slightest attention to what he was saying, met his final bow with tumultuous cheers, and dispersed to the *pulperias* and dance-halls.

A new government had sprung into existence in Mes-calía, and Harding, rising to greet Estrada as he left the balcony and entered the room, thought to himself:

"It's been a hard pull, but I think we've done a good, clean job."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE late autumn made a vast difference in the appearance of the garden behind Acklom's house. The flowers had disappeared from their beds, and in their place stood heaps of compost and straw. The leaves had long left the close branches of the horse-chestnut tree. The one bit of green still visible was the thick-growing ivy that covered the trellised pathway. The animals and birds were still there, it is true; but their cries and even their movements were tempered and almost stopped by the chill of the approaching winter.

Acklom, hugging that sense of privacy which lay deep in his nature, had ceased to use the garden since the leaves had fallen. The only sign of life was when the two boar-hounds were turned loose for exercise. As they romped and raced to and fro, their deep barks were answered by a chorus of cries from the inmates of the cages, till it seemed that Bedlam had broken loose.

It was to the notes of such a din that, one morning toward the end of November, Wallace opened the door leading from Mike's saloon and entered the dark path beneath the ivy-colored trellis.

The dogs knew him well, and after a short and boisterous greeting they romped away, and Hussein let him

into the combination of chart-room and library that Acklom used as his office.

It was only nine-thirty, and Wallace knew that his friend would not yet be visible, for it was his invariable practice to spend the hour from nine to ten in physical exercises of a most vigorous kind. These were varied in character, and wound up with a bout at wrestling and boxing in which Mike's two stalwart sons were his partners. Such was Acklom's strength that, at the end of his morning's work, he was always fresher than his two opponents. Then came a hot bath, followed by an icy shower and an alcohol rub, and Acklom was ready for his day.

Wallace was studying the map of Mescalita when Acklom entered, saying:

"Hello, John. Why so early?"

"A telegram came late last night. It's good news from Mescalita, so couldn't wait. Here it is."

Acklom took it, and, without glancing at it, walked to his chair behind the desk and, sitting down, drew his code dictionary toward him. He was a man of method, and though he knew that Wallace had already decoded the message, he always did that himself before discussing the matter involved in the cipher.

The wire was the one sent by Harding on his arrival at Tres Pinos, and contained only two numbers, "11-4," which, decoded, gave one word, "Begin."

Acklom turned his blue spectacles on Wallace and said:

"Your friend Harding—for I suppose this despatch comes from him—shows his banker's training. He's too

damned economical. How do *you* translate this word 'Begun,' John?"

"Why, that the operations against Obregon have started. First, you are right that it is from Harding; for I arranged that only his telegrams should be unsigned. If you look over all the wires we've received from that end, you will find that the Governor of Lipaza signed the one announcing Everett's arrival at Talco with his cipher name, and that the several despatches that Everett has sent, describing his advance into Mescalita, were signed by his cipher name. This wire is unsigned, and therefore from Harding. The real movement could not begin until Harding had linked up with Everett, and this telegram is as plain as a pike-staff to me. It means that Harding and the Aldaban group have joined Everett and are about to begin operations against Obregon. It also means that we must look sharp and start a final assault on the Mescalita foreign bonds. Luckily, I've made preparations for that. Our press work has been good, and, as you've seen, we've had front-page stuff in all the papers announcing an anti-foreign movement in Mescalita, with the possibility of a revolution there. All that should knock the bonds, but has not yet done so.

"You remember, Walter, I told you last evening that despite our brokers' manœuvres, and I believe we've got the best boys in the street working for us, we have been unable to break these infernal bonds below fifteen. Directly they get below that point, buying orders come in. We've traced this play to a group of German Jews, and, as I told you, I feel convinced that these are acting for

the Krupp people, who feel confident that, on the arrival of their artillery, Schwartz's crowd will come into power and the bonds will be worth a buy. This, of course, endangers your plans for getting the bonds at ten or better. So far the German crowd seems content to hold them at fifteen; for directly they get a point or two higher than fifteen, they begin to unload on us.

"Now, Walter, why don't you rest content with the big profit which these bonds at fifteen or a point or two higher will give you? I'll bet we can get the whole lot at between sixteen and twenty."

Acklom shook his head.

"No. I made up my mind to get 'em at ten, and at ten I will have them. No German Jew bunch are going to make me change my plans.

"This is the first time I ever had any dealings in Wall Street in my life. Until this game started, I knew nothing of that business; but the last six weeks have taught me a good deal, and though it bored me at first, I'm getting really interested in the game at last, and I'm going to make my first play a winning one."

As he spoke he opened a drawer and drew from it a slip of paper.

"At closing hour yesterday we had 14,600,000 of these bonds. That leaves 5,400,000 to get, and then we'll have the whole lot. I'm running this show, although you handle the details. If this telegram 'Begun' means what you say, we've got to hustle. So begin to-day to throw on the market lumps of the stuff. We'll test the strength of our opponents once and for all. Offer a good block at fifteen and a half. If they buy, make it

sixteen, and see how high they will go. You can play with one million and a half of the stuff to-day.

"You see, John, I already speak of these *bonos exteriores* as if they had reached par, for I intend that they shall. Now, get to your office and start to work. Use your best judgment. You need not call me up. Be here at three-thirty or thereabouts, when you can tell me what's happened. Now, just a moment.

"This afternoon I want to go over with you our final plans for the school system in Mescalita, for, as you know, that's where my profit is going. You said your report on the matter would be ready to-day. I've got strong ideas on the subject, and I'm curious to see whether they gee with the plans of the high-brows whose brains you have been tapping."

Wallace, who had been putting on his overcoat while Acklom was speaking the last words, seized his hat, waved his hand, and hurried from the room.

It was nearly four o'clock before he showed up.

"Well, how goes the battle?" said Acklom.

Wallace's face was as calm as usual, but he sighed as he took a seat, and asked for a whisky and soda and lit a cigar.

"I haven't got much to report," said he. "That Jew crowd seems to be acting under fixed instructions to hold the bonds as far as possible at fifteen. They bought one hundred thousand at fifteen and a half, and when we bid sixteen, they handed us back eighty thousand. I stopped the market for an hour, and then offered fifty thousand at fifteen. No bid. But when we followed with fifty thousand at fourteen and a half,

they were snapped up. Before closing I got these back at fifteen and a half."

"You are losing your nerve, John," said Acklom. "I told you to play with one million and a half in order to make the market rock and try these men out to the limit."

Wallace shook his head.

"That's what our brokers advised; but, you see, Walter, they don't know as we do that in a day or two we expect news that will knock the bottom out of the bonds altogether. Let me handle this in my own way, please."

Acklom shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. You can do what you please until the news we expect comes, but then we'll touch off the dynamite. Now, give us the news about the school system."

Wallace rose, went to his overcoat, and pulled out a large roll of papers.

"I've got many replies to our proposition. That was a great idea of yours, offering anonymously a ten-thousand-dollar prize for the best school system suitable to Spanish-American countries. *The New York Splurge*, once I put the ten thousand dollars in its hands to prove the good faith of the affair, has handled the matter with enthusiasm; but they'll have a hard time naming the winner, or I miss my guess. To whomever they give the prize, the result will be the same—a loss of circulation to them; for the matter has aroused such interest that it is bound to end in bitter controversy."

Acklom yawned.

"Leave the papers here," said Acklom. "I'll have 'em read to me to-morrow."

At this moment there was a rap at the door, and Hussein entered, bearing on a tray an old-fashioned brass samovar, and quietly began to arrange the tea things on the table. He was about to go when Acklom told him to sit down. The Arab bowed, and without more ado placed himself cross-legged upon the carpet.

"Have you written that letter to your people, Hussein?"

"Yes, Sidi," replied the Arab, and, rising, handed his master a large sheet of paper covered with closely written Arabic characters.

Acklom, turning to Wallace who was pouring the tea, said:

"This Mescalian matter, big as it is, only fills half my mind. My real thoughts are in the Sahara Desert, where Hussein's people are becoming very restless, and all seems ripe for a real movement. If my eyes would let me, I'd wait only long enough for Bollard to get back; and with him, Hussein, and Fong, I'd make a dart for Africa. Doctor Foosa says that I've been a good boy and obeyed orders; but he doesn't give me much encouragement at that. I suppose he's afraid that I'd break out."

Wallace smiled.

"He knows you, Walter, and that if he gives you an inch, you'll take an ell. But, for God's sake, old man, follow the doctor's orders exactly. It's worth your while, believe me. That's all I can say."

Acklom sighed.

"I'm not a fool. I am following his orders to the letter, but this inactivity is maddening. I expect to be rewarded for it, though, and to get well. So I've got Hussein to write to his people in Fezzan to organize against my coming, to store up half their date crop, and to trade the rest for as many camels as they can get. When my eyes get well, I'm going to make Fezzan my base for the biggest movement the Sahara has ever known."

He read Hussein's letter with care, and handed it back with the words:

"That's good. You can go, my boy."

As the Arab was leaving the room, Acklom stopped him with a gesture. Then turning to Wallace, he said:

"Will you dine with me to-night, John?"

Wallace nodded.

"Good. Set the table for two, Hussein."

Little was achieved the next day. The foreign holders of the *bonos exteriores* showed, if anything, increased firmness, and once Wallace was forced to buy at sixteen the bonds which he had sold at fourteen and a half.

Again he dined with Acklom. Of the two, Wallace was much the more nervous and was almost garrulous, repeating again and again his experiences of the day, and unceasingly urged Acklom to be satisfied with less profit, even if he was forced to pay twenty for the rest of the bonds.

Acklom was fond of his cousin and had the greatest confidence in him, but could not sympathize with his anxiety. He was a man of fixed purpose and accustomed

to have his own way, even if it took time to achieve his plans.

"Now, John, take it easy," he said. "One would think, from your nervousness, that the success or failure of this whole enterprise depended upon you. Take it easy, I say. You really have no responsibility whatever. Think of the boys fighting in Mescalita. They've got their hands full, I expect; while here in New York I am the one who should worry, and I don't a bit. We ought to get news by to-morrow night from the other end. Till then let's be calm and see what we can do toward working out a good school system for Mescalita. Have you had any more letters on that subject?"

Wallace sighed.

"You are a wonder, Walter. I don't see how you can take things so quietly."

"Shucks!" said Acklom. "Look, John, I haven't got one gray hair on my head, and have had for the last twenty years nothing but what you call worry. I call it fun. Now to work on the school system."

They talked for an hour, and Acklom leaned back, placed his hands behind his head, closed his eyes and seemed to sink into a reverie. Wallace watched him in silence, for he knew better than to interrupt the train of his cousin's thoughts. Suddenly Acklom roused himself and, bringing his clenched fist down upon the table, said:

"I'm sure we've won this fight. I feel it. But victory is like any other form of ecstasy; it brings in its train a reaction or feeling of depression and doubt. We've won this fight all right, but have we used the best method

in winning it? I believe so. Of course bloodshed is a disagreeable thing, but there are cases where bloodshed is not only necessary, but advisable. The body politic is altogether like the human body. It has its ailments. There are cases where medicine or diplomacy will avail; there are also cases where surgery or war are necessary. I think we have done the only thing possible."

Shortly before eight o'clock the next morning Acklom lay in bed, drinking tea and ready to listen to Fong's rapid, but indistinct rendering, of the news of the day.

Fong, though speaking and reading English without difficulty, looked at a newspaper from the Chinese point of view. To him the head-lines, black and formidable, held the whole story. These he read carefully and distinctly. He never could quite realize the value of the mass of small print which followed and always asked his master if he should read it.

On the front page of the first paper he attacked his eyes were fascinated by a particularly black, and therefore attractive, head-line: "REVOLUTION IN MEXICALIA. DEATH OF PRESIDENT OBREGON. ESTRADA REACHES POWER. FIRST ACT, REPUDIATION OF ALL OUTSIDE INFLUENCE. REFUSES TO PAY FOREIGN BONDS OR EVEN THEIR INTEREST. ATTACKS GERMANS."

Fong, though thoroughly aware of his master's interest in this particular subject, read the above notice with a degree of slowness and calm that would have been

maddening to any one who did not know the intense self-control of the Chinese.

Acklom, who was on the point of raising his tea-cup to his lips, placed it quietly on the table and said:

"Read that again, Fong."

At the end, Acklom told him to read the fine print. This, thanks to Wallace's care, amounted to a column and a half, containing not only Estrada's speech, but phrases directed like a flight of arrows against the value of the Mescalien bonds.

Fong had scarcely finished when the private telephone rang. The voice was of course that of Wallace:

"Have you seen the papers, Walter? I'm down town as this message tells you. Cut out your physical exercises to-day and stay at the 'phone. I've got your general orders, but I may have to make combinations before the market opens, and I want your counsel."

"John, you are a loafer. You hate to work your mind. You don't need any counsel. Sell those damned bonds down to ten at least; and then, if you have to, buy. Have no fear. By this time Krupp knows that his cannon have fallen into the hands of Obregon's enemies, and the bonds will have no support. If you show nerve, you may get them at six. Don't bother to call me until half past ten. In fact, Doctor Foosa is coming to see me at eleven, and he's the only man I'm afraid of, and I want to be calm when I get his final verdict. No, don't call me before twelve, whatever happens. Now I'll ring off."

Twelve o'clock had hardly struck when the private

telephone rang. This time Acklom picked up the receiver in the chart-room downstairs.

"Walter, Walter," came the words, "you are a wizard! The market went to pieces; but of course I lost my nerve as usual, and began buying at twelve. That checked the torrent for a minute, and then I remembered your orders, and without support the prices sagged until I finally cashed in the lot at between five and six. The last transaction was at eleven-thirty. What do you think happened a minute ago? One of old Baxter's men came in. I mean the man who turned down Everett when he wanted help. He asked me if I was interested in these Mescalian bonds. I said no, and told him I was busy. He took a seat without being asked, and offered me twelve for the lot. Then fifteen for half of them, and went out in a rage when I told him that I knew nothing whatever about the matter. I am coming up to lunch. Your hunch yesterday that we'd won was O. K."

When Wallace arrived for luncheon, his heavy, almost bovine features wore a look of unwonted animation. His customary reserve had disappeared. He seemed tingling with joy.

To his surprise, Acklom greeted him with indifference, and in answer to his question, "Why, what's the matter, Walter?" the latter said:

"I don't yet know my fate. Foosa did not come this morning. Instead, he sent word that he was called to Chicago to perform a serious operation, and could not be here for three or four days. This uncertainty makes me sick. I had counted upon a real field-day of joy,

victory in the bond matter and the knowledge that my eyes were cured. Well, there's no use kicking. Let's have lunch."

Three days passed and then, by cable this time, came the news of Estrada's change of front, and that the bonds would be paid in full, with all back interest.

It was late in the afternoon when this news arrived. Wallace brought it in person.

"Walter," he said, "do you realize what this means? You have made an enormous fortune. It seems too good to be true."

Acklom grunted.

"Nothing is too good to be true, provided it is really good. It's true I don't need all this money; but I can't give it back to the Mescalians, because they're not yet fit to handle such a sum. However, I can remit the interest, and that I'll do. The school system will eat up some of the rest, and I've dug up the idea of spending a million or two in a decent way. We'll establish coöperative stores all over Mescalia where American goods, and only American goods, will be sold at the lowest possible prices. This will not only help the good old U. S. A., but will civilize the Mescalians; for civilization has commerce as a spur. By increasing the wants of primitive man, we'll force him to work to satisfy those wants. For, after all, civilization means work."

There was a rap on the door and Hussein entered:

"Doctor Foosa," he announced.

"Tell him to come in," said Acklom.

As he spoke, his strong hands gripped the arms of his chair until they turned white.

"Well, my boy," said the old oculist, "take off those blue goggles and throw them away. You don't need them any more. Your eyes were cured three weeks ago, but I was afraid you might strain them, knowing your love of reading. And please don't read too much the next two or three weeks. The only orders I have to give are that, if you return to a country where the sun's glare is strong, wear, please, dark glasses when in the sunlight."

Acklom's face was a study. For a moment anger showed, then intense relief.

"I hate to be fooled, Doctor, even if it is for my good, and you admit that you've been fooling me for three weeks. But thank God for the news you bring! So I'll forgive you."

He leaned back in his chair, stretched his arms vigorously for a moment over his head, and as he lowered them, removed the colored glasses. His eyes blinked for a moment at the unaccustomed light, and then with a quiet fixity of gaze rested upon the blue spectacles held in his right hand.

"If I've got to use blue goggles, Doctor, I won't throw these away, for they've brought me luck. And if what you say is true, where I'm going, I'll need 'em. I'm off on my travels again, and this time it's the Desert of Sahara."

